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LECTURES ON REASON AND REVELATION.

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LECTURES

ON

REASON AND REVELATION,

DELIVERED IN

ST. ANN'S CHURCH, NEW-YORK,

DURING THE

Season of Advent, 1867.

BY THE

REV. THOMAS S. PRESTON.

“ You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”—ST. JOHN viii. 32.



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	9
<i>LECTURE FIRST.</i>	
THE OFFICE OF REASON,	51
<i>LECTURE SECOND.</i>	
RELATIONS OF REASON AND FAITH,	84
<i>LECTURE THIRD.</i>	
CONDITIONS OF REVELATION,	124
<i>LECTURE FOURTH.</i>	
REVELATION AND PROTESTANTISM,	166
<i>LECTURE FIFTH.</i>	
REVELATION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, .	215

INTRODUCTION.



INTRODUCTION.



IN the following lectures it is the aim of the author to set forth, in a clear and concise manner, a simple argument whereby the claims of the Catholic Church are substantiated by reason alone. In the midst of the excitements of our day some of the plainest truths are forgotten, and men hold opinions or pass to conclusions without any logical grounds whatever. They even sometimes contradict the propositions which are self-evident to reason in their zeal for intellectual progress and emancipation from the thralldom of the past. That which is new is sought after,

even though it overthrow the belief of truths heretofore generally admitted. We are not believers in total depravity, and have, therefore, great confidence in the good which still remains in human nature. And as we know that God's grace is ever with man to assist him to the knowledge of the truth, and to lead him in the way of virtue, we have great hopes that the intellectual and moral movements of our day will guide the honest and sincere mind to the true light which is its only illumination. It is a great mistake to suppose that the Catholic Church requires of any man that he should do away with his reason, or cease to exercise those powers which God has given him for the proper appreciation of truth and goodness. To man's intelligence revelation is addressed, and every new light from above only serves to enlarge the thirst for knowledge. The

divine ways are ever harmonious, and the supernatural truth will never contradict the natural. The argument of these lectures depends upon the force of reason alone. We briefly explain the nature of human reason and the sphere of its operation. We show how the divine revelation gives its unerring evidence, to which a just intelligence must submit. We vindicate all the natural powers, and defend the exercise of their just prerogatives. God, speaking to man, is bound to give him unmistakable signs that He is speaking, and that no deceiver is imposing upon us. When these signs are given, then we are bound to believe the divine testimony, and entirely to accept truths which the veracity of our Maker vouches for. Private judgment has its full scope, as to it are clearly presented the tokens of every supernatural intervention. The extrinsic credi-

bility of doctrines proposed to faith is thus assured to the full conviction of the understanding. If we go on to say that reason assured of a revelation cannot then be the judge of the intrinsic credibility of a dogma clearly revealed, we only say that reason must act in its own sphere, and that the finite must not venture to measure the infinite.

It seems to us that no logical objection can be made against such a restriction of private judgment. If man, by his unaided powers, could find out all necessary truth, there would be no need of a revelation. Of things beyond the scope of his understanding man can certainly be no judge, while it is equally certain that the word of God can never deceive.

It is also a great misunderstanding to suppose that Catholics are not allowed to use

their reason, or that faith has taken the place of our ordinary intelligence. So far from the truth is this supposition, that the aim of the present work will be to show that Catholics alone are the followers of true reason, always yielding obedience to its just dictates, and never swerving in any way from its rigid conclusions. The Catholic faith presents all its unanswerable claims before the mind, and then, as it appeals to our natural sense of truth and justice, it cannot contradict itself by doing away with the very faculty which is made the judge of its pretensions. Reason, rightly understood, leads with certainty to the light of revelation, and that light does in no way extinguish the spirit or vitality of nature. There is full scope for the play of the highest intelligence, not in the contradiction of evidence clearly established, nor in doubting truth already manifest, but in the

constant and daily increasing appreciation of the beauties of God's revelation whereby all our faculties are brought into perfect harmony. There is neither manliness nor wisdom in the state of perpetual doubt which appears to be chosen by many as the exercise of a precious liberty. The Catholic believes because he has evidence of the divine power and goodness, and in the very highest exercise of reason bows down to God and Him only. No human organization has a right to bind our consciences, and no body of men can form or direct our faith. God alone is our master, whose word is a law to our understandings and our hearts. The church is recognized by us because He has established it, and given to it authority to teach in His name, and we are ever ready to give to any honest mind a reason for the faith we hold and profess.

Such principles, united with the earnest hope of doing good, have led the author to prepare and deliver the following lectures. There is no one whose sphere of influence is so limited that he may not be of some service to his fellows, especially in a day like ours, when questions of the most vital nature are agitating mankind. The argument chosen has necessarily been placed in the most concise form and adapted to a popular discourse. Reason is first examined, that our ideas of its nature and office may be cleared from all obscurity, that we may have a just notion of its powers and the sphere in which they operate. It is secondly demonstrated that faith, properly understood, can furnish no contradiction to the reason, since it moves in its own plane and depends upon supernatural light. If we have no other teaching than that of pure nature, then there is no scope

for faith. If God has made a revelation, then He must also attest it by proofs sufficient to convince our understanding.

The third lecture asks from reason the conditions of a revelation, on the supposition that God were to make one to man. For it is evident that the communication of new and important truth must be in accordance with the laws of reason and the principles of evidence. Having settled these preliminary points, we are prepared to determine if God has been pleased to make a revelation, and to examine closely the systems of Protestantism and Catholicity, that we may know which bears the stamp of divine authority. There are really no other systems which present themselves before us as claiming to represent the divine teacher who is the founder of Christianity. Those who reject our Lord Jesus Christ in His person and office can

scarcely be said to believe in any revelation at all, and, therefore, offer no proof to the reason for the belief in any thing supernatural. A revelation, then, being supposed, the question is between Protestantism and Catholicity. They are contradictory, and cannot stand together. If one be true, the other is false. So we are prepared to determine which of the two complies with the conditions which reason itself suggests, and, therefore, to which of the two the honest mind should submit. If it be shown that the Protestant religion does not meet with any of the necessary conditions of revelation, and that it cannot give any sure proofs of divine mission, then it is demonstrated that it is not of God. If, on the contrary, the Catholic Church answers to every test of reason, and satisfies every just demand, while it presents unerring signs of its divine origin, then every heart which

seeks for light and peace should at once cast aside the chains of prejudice and follow where reason and conscience guide. We are quite confident that no other course can meet the approval of an enlightened understanding.

In the necessarily brief and rapid plan which has been marked out, it may appear to some that we have passed cursorily over important arguments; while we have been obliged to repeat many statements which recur in each lecture. These defects are hardly to be avoided, when, in five short and popular discourses, truths so fundamental are brought forward and principles so essential are explained. Every one will follow the bent of his own mind. We have sought to meet a class of difficulties which have stood in the way of the conversion of many, and to open a train of thought suited to the needs of mul-

titudes with whom our lot has been cast. It would be far from our intention to do injustice to any religious system, or to misrepresent any of its characteristics. The fair and conscientious reader may decide whether Protestantism be that which we have described it, since notorious facts alone have been the basis of our judgment. We believe that the general opinion of mankind will sustain our propositions. Two objections, however, may arise, which, for want of time in the delivery of the lectures, we desire to answer more fully in this place. It may be said that it is unfair to give to the Catholic Church the credit of the miracles of Christ and His apostles, and at the same time to refuse their testimony as in favor of Christianity in general, including Protestantism.

Secondly. It may be objected that the miracles of Christ are not sufficient to sub-

stantiate the claims of the Catholic Church, from which men should demand signs and wonders in every age. For the better elucidation of our subject, both these objections need to be considered at some length.

1. It cannot be denied that Jesus Christ came into this world to introduce a revelation whereby new and most precious truth was to be communicated to men. He came, therefore, to reveal a complete and harmonious system, which, for the good of the world, was to be preserved to the end of time. Any other view of His mission would be unworthy of His divine character, and inconsistent with the means He employed to found His system of religion. For He, the Son of God, not only became man, but humbled Himself to the most ignominious of deaths. In this view are, however, contained two things, either of which is fatal to Protestant-

ism. First, the doctrines He taught and for which He gave up His life must, of necessity, for more harmonious whole, not to be broken or impaired without vital injury. A *part* of Christian doctrine cannot be called Christianity. It may be an approximation to it, and be true as far as it goes; but it cannot be called the religious system introduced into this world by Christ. And sometimes the suppression of one doctrine neutralizes any benefit to be derived from the admission of another. Now, Protestantism delivers no system of religion, since, in its various phases, there is a tissue of contradictions which leave nothing for a result. We have said, and with all sincerity, that it witnesses to no doctrine whatever, because there is no doctrine, not even the divinity of Christ, which is not denied by one or more of the Protestant sects. It would be difficult, then, to see how the

miracles wrought to prove the mission of our Lord and His Apostles could be adduced as evidence in favor of a religious system which, taken in the aggregate, has no articles of belief. And if it be said that every Protestant church should stand upon its own feet, and be judged on its individual merits, we reply that such a course, while it would be illogical, would not help the matter in any way conceivable. It would be illogical, in examining a great system held in common by a vast multitude of adherents, to exclude any of the members from the responsibility of evils directly flowing from the principles adopted by all. If the system destroys all unity in doctrine, then all who follow the system are involved in the common discord. It would not help the matter, because even if there be shown a body of consistent doctrine in any particular Protestant Church, that

alone would not prove that the doctrines were true or that they were delivered by Jesus Christ. If the principle of Protestantism which allows each and every man to judge of the intrinsic credibility of all dogmas were eschewed, then there remains no need of argument against Protestantism. We do not deny that the miracles of Christ and His Apostles may be adduced to prove the truth of any doctrine really revealed by Him. And there are those among Protestants who accept many such doctrines which they have unconsciously received from the Catholic Church. The only question between us is regarding two opposing systems. Can the founder of Christianity be supposed to have introduced into the world such a complex of negations, in which there is no room for the defence of positive truth, and where unity of doctrine is an impossibility? This

is the only point of our argument. We do not go into the examination of articles of belief, some of which may be true and others may be false.

Secondly. If the true Christianity is not only one harmonious creed, but must necessarily have length of days and perpetuity of life, then the religion of Christ, for which His miracles may be called to give their sure testimony, must come down from Him, and be delivered to the world by His authority in unbroken succession. Here the novelty of Protestantism is destructive of all its claims. It was born of the convulsions of the sixteenth century, and shocked the whole earth by its strange features. The only way to articulate Protestantism to the Christianity of the Apostolic day, is, as we shall see, to assert that at the time of the Reformation the revelation of Christ had perished from

the earth, or, which is the same thing, had become utterly corrupt; and then to assert, without the slightest shadow of proof, and against all facts, that Protestantism is primitive Christianity, the favored but short-lived religion which about the year one hundred forsook the earth, and only returned after a lapse of fourteen centuries. This common assertion of so many, when stated plainly in this form, seems like sarcasm, so absurd is it in its very terms. Does not any honest mind see that it upsets the divinity of Jesus Christ whose promises cannot fail if He be God? To what end did He come upon earth, if thus His great revelation was so soon to pass away?

It is quite evident that the system of religion which can be historically traced to Jesus Christ, is the only one which can claim the sanction of His divine promises, and wonderful miracles. And such is not Protestantism,

which found an origin in convulsions which tended to the overthrow of all faith, and in principles which are subversive of all revealed religion. We do not then refuse the testimony of the miracles of Christ to the support of Christianity in general, but only to the Protestant system, and we are prepared to prove that all that is received as Christianity among men is only part of Catholic doctrine, in other words, that Christianity is synonymous with Catholicity.

2. The miracles of our Lord and His apostles are sufficient to authenticate the Catholic Church, if it be once proved that that church was founded by Him; for whatever He did was in favor of that system which He established. In our fifth lecture, as the reader will see, we briefly endeavor to make it evident that such is the truth. The argument which we advance may be briefly summed up as

follows; Christ founded a Church for the principal end of teaching and preserving His Gospel upon earth. He promised that this Church should be upheld by His divine power and should continue to the end of time. That Church is the Catholic Church, because there is none other which descends from Him, and because it alone possesses the characteristics of the one body which was organized by the Apostles. So it seems to us that our argument is complete and unanswerable. One of two consequences flows from the denial of it, either that the promise of Christ has failed, together with the corruption or destruction of the religion He revealed, or that there has been a new revelation to take the place of the one made by Himself. It will not avail any one to deny that He ever established any Church, since this is contrary to all facts of which we have any

knowledge ; and secondly, if He really did not found any church, then the organization of one afterward was not only an act of the most arbitrary power, but a radical corruption of primitive truth. We find in the earliest history of the Christian era a church existing, and claiming without question the very rights and prerogatives which have characterized the Catholic Church of later days. How did that church start upon its extraordinary career, and when did it begin its assumptions of power? Why was it that nobody was found to protest against its usurpations, during the lifetime of the very disciples of the Apostles? In any other cause but that of religion, we are persuaded that no one would venture to advance so absurd an idea ; and why cannot men be as honest in doctrinal controversies as in all other disputations? Whether then

you say that our Lord Jesus Christ founded a church, or assume that He did not, he who denies the claims of the Catholic faith is obliged to confess in any case that Christianity became a failure. If the church became corrupt, then the gates of hell prevailed against it; if the original Christianity embraced no idea of one infallible teaching body, then the unauthorized introduction of such an one was the most direct evidence of its complete destruction. If Christianity did fail in either of these ways, then no one can be expected to believe the divinity of Jesus Christ its founder; nay more, it will be impossible to receive Him as a true prophet, and the consequence is, as we have pointed out, the logical rejection of all evidence, and the adoption of blank infidelity. So absurd and frightful a conclusion is sufficient to establish the falsity of premises by which it

is reached. God cannot deceive us, nor can the first principles of our reason be called in question. The objector is driven to the dilemma of admitting the authority of the Catholic Church, or of accepting the entire failure of Christianity, and with such failure, the overthrow of even natural religion. We hope that these conclusions will be made evident in the course of the present brief discussion.

Now if it be really so that the existence of Christianity is bound up with the Catholic Church, then we have done no injustice to claim all the miracles of Christ and His Apostles as evidence of the divine mission of that church. They proved that the system of religion taught by our Blessed Lord was from God, that He was God, and that He had full power to teach and to inspire teachers, to promise and to perform. If

there is an identity between the Church which Jesus Christ founded, and the Catholic Church of our own day, then all the signs which authenticated the words of our Lord, and the Apostolic preaching, are plainly to be adduced in behalf of Catholicity. Prove a break in the line of succession, establish any corruption in essential doctrine, and our argument is overcome; but alas! when you have, to your satisfaction, brought forward such proofs, you look for Christianity and find it nowhere. So we justly reason to the unprejudiced and conscientious reader, that the miracles of the early days are good evidence for the truths they vindicated, for the religion of Jesus Christ and for none other. We argue that, if Protestantism be from God, it must in like manner show its unmistakable proofs of divine origin, and failing to find these, we are compelled to reject all its pretensions. It is

not true, therefore, that we are obliged to continually give supernatural signs and to vindicate to every age, by miracles, the truth which, once clearly revealed, must, in the nature of things, stand for ever. In our closing lecture we give many proofs of the divinity of the Catholic faith. We show its wonderful progress and victory over enemies which have been arrayed against it on every side, and which no mere human power can vanquish. We show its supernatural life, not only in this remarkable vitality, but also in the purity and blessed influence of its doctrine. We demonstrate that it answers to all the conditions of reason, and satisfies every want of the soul. More than this cannot be asked of God. A revelation once well authenticated will stand until another equally well established shall take its place, and two divine revelations made at different times cannot

contradict each other, any more than God can contradict Himself.

But we are willing to meet the question of the objector, and to speak of later miracles in this place for the better understanding of the whole subject. Let it be understood, then, that we do not admit that such miracles are necessary to the evidences of the Catholic Church; and we are ready to affirm that supernatural signs have in every age been attendant upon that one body of believers which Christ organized and purchased by His blood. They confirm the faith of the good, sometimes they lead the doubting to conversion, and they are always to be found on the side of strong faith and high virtue. In regard to these miracles a few words will certainly be appropriate.

In the first place, being effects supernatural, they stand upon the same foundation as the

extraordinary facts we read of in Scripture. They depend upon evidence which in every case is to be rigidly sifted, that every possible care be taken to avoid deception. If the evidence be not good, then they cannot be accepted, while, if the proofs are satisfactory to the reason, they cannot be refused. No well-informed person could say that Catholics are disposed to deceive themselves and their fellows by counterfeit signs and wonders. No greater misfortune can be conceived of than such deceit, and nothing but evil can flow from it. We demand for all later miracles the same confirmation which we ask for the wonderful works of Christ. We reason justly and consistently in both cases. There must be a fact evidently supernatural, and this fact must be attested by competent witnesses who have no interest to deceive, and no power to do so, even if such were

their intention. Upon such testimony we are forced to believe, because we cannot refuse assent to sufficient evidence.

Secondly, there can be no prejudice against miracles which occur in our own day, any more than against those of the Apostolic age. We have no reason to expect the same wonders which our Lord wrought, because at the beginning of a revelation such signs are more especially necessary. But there is no possible objection to the continuance of miracles whenever the Almighty power shall see just cause for them. The Christian religion is a divine system, altogether supernatural from beginning to end, and therefore it would be natural to look for the tokens of God's presence. Such tokens were constantly given in the old law, where the majestic ritual was only a figure of the graces of Christianity. Moreover, our Lord expressly declared

that such signs should not be uncommon in His dispensation. "Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? Otherwise, believe for the very works' sake. Amen, amen, I say to you, he that believeth in me, the works that I shall do, he also shall do, and greater than these shall he do."* "These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name they shall cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues: they shall take up serpents: and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover."† Now, certainly incredulity is a fault, and unwillingness to accept competent testimony is a sin against reason. Once admitting the great and stupendous facts which introduced Christianity, we shall not be disposed to deny

* St. John xiv. 11-12.

† St. Mark xvi. 17-18.

other facts relying upon indubitable evidence.

Thirdly. It is easy for any one to satisfy himself as to the genuineness of the later miracles by an accurate examination of them in detail. There have been many extraordinary occurrences which have obtained popular belief, and have enjoyed more or less confidence, but have never been subjected to any critical examination in order to receive ecclesiastical sanction. Miracles received and acknowledged by the church, after the severe tests to which they are applied, are certainly beyond all doubt, and command the assent of every reasonable mind. This is hardly the place to produce such cases, with their proofs, which would fill a large treatise. They may be found in the lives of the Saints, and in the history of the processes of their canonization. Our Lord raised persons to life who

had been dead, but the Gospels only record three cases ; His Apostles did the same. Canonized saints have been distinguished by the same gift ; such, among others, as St. Raymond de Pennafort, St. Dominic, St. Philip, and St. Francis Xavier, who raised from the grave five and twenty persons. We believe that the miracles wrought by this latter saint are generally admitted. They were instrumental in the conversion of thousands from paganism, yet no one can doubt that they were testimonies in favor of the religion which he preached. The Apostles on the day of Pentecost received the gift of tongues. We read the same of St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Lewis Bertrand. St. Peter walked upon the sea, as our blessed Lord had done ; and St. Peter of Alcantara crossed the Tagus as if it was dry land, and St. Benno the Elbe. St. Raymond de Pen-

nafort crossed the open sea from Majorca to Barcelona on his cloak, which he spread upon the waters, and on which he sat as if it had been an ordinary boat. Nearly all the miracles of the apostolic day, as well as of the prophets in the old law, have been repeated over and over again by the same hand of God, in the person of His saints. No one can with reason deny these facts, which are found everywhere in the history of the Catholic Church, or refuse to apply to them the same tests as these which make evident the supernatural power of Christ and His Apostles. The first step is to examine well the fact reported, and to see if it exceeds the forces of nature, because no event which can be produced by natural causes is to be referred to a supernatural power. The second step is to assure ourselves by witnesses in every way reliable, that the fact transpired as it was

reported. Here we believe that the authorities at Rome will be found far more critical and severe than the majority of mankind, and any miracle which can pass the test of their investigations can safely be considered as undoubted. Such miracles are an irresistible proof of the divinity of the religion which they attend and sanction, for surely God could not interpose in favor of any counterfeit of His revelation. For example, if St. Francis Xavier, one of the first and most illustrious members of the Society of Jesus, raised the dead to life, as the most unexceptionable testimony goes to prove, we have a right to conclude that the divine favor attended the faith which he taught, and for the extension of which he gave the whole strength of his life. We sincerely believe that there is as good evidence that he worked such a miracle, as there is that the Apostles

wrought the wonders which are ascribed to them. Some Protestants have a very erroneous notion of the feeling of intelligent Catholics on this subject. They call us superstitious, and suppose that we are ever ready to accept any strange or remarkable thing which may be reported, without weighing either testimony or facts. The truth is very far from this. We are not called upon by our creed to believe in any miracle which has not every sign of authenticity; and to such belief, as it is nothing but the conviction of our understanding, every reasonable man is bound. As Catholics we must have faith in the supernatural, and in the power of God to work miracles when He shall see fit to advance by such means His own glory and the good of His creatures. But for the acceptance of any particular miracle we are guided by the principles of reason, and act

not more as Catholics than as intelligent beings. There is no article of faith which binds us to assent to any such particular miracle, which, as a fact, must stand or fall by the weight of testimony.

We do not, therefore, see a flaw in the evidence which the Catholic Church presents to reason, to establish her mission from God. She appears before us at the end of nearly nineteen centuries, embracing in her communion the vast majority of those who believe in divine revelation. She binds them together in the confession of one faith, which is echoed from many lands, from all tribes and tongues. This alone is a supernatural result for which no human power can account. She leads those who follow her counsels and obey her laws to the purest and highest virtue, making them faithful to all the duties of life, and thus conserving the

foundations of all social order and the elements of all true progress. She speaks of divine things, and with an unhesitating voice, and shows her clear and uninterrupted descent from Jesus Christ, whose authority is committed to her hands. No other organization can do this with the faintest show of truth. She tramples upon no principle of reason, and in no way contradicts the light of nature. She fulfils the law and the prophets, establishing thus a perfect harmony between all the genuine manifestations of divine truth. She raises man to the highest degree of culture in science and art, and although she speaks definitely on the things of faith, and answers clearly the great questions of his soul, she leaves him ever the exercise of the whole nobility of his nature. It is no degradation of his powers, that he should believe the voice of God, and by faith look into that

unseen world where are glories and mysteries beyond the vision of simple reason. For thus, with every faculty of his being intact, he mounts up toward the throne of his great Creator, whose beauty is the attraction of his soul, and learns to walk in a higher sphere, in that light which is the food of angels. A system so perfect in itself, so mighty for good, so triumphant over evil, can only be from the Infinite Mind, the great First Cause, from whom creation arose in empty space, and order sprang from primeval chaos.

What shall be said of that system of Christianity which is the only rival of the Catholic Church, a system of modern birth, which has not one cohesive principle of unity, whose very foundations are the elements of discord? Such a system has not, and cannot hold the minds of men. It is inconsistent with itself, and contradictory to the most evident lights

of reason. Led by it into the darkness of doubt and unbelief, many a noble mind has made shipwreck of all that is godlike. Days gloomier than those of paganism have returned where, in Christian lands, are built again temples to the "unknown God," where pleasure steals the affections which were made for the heavenly paradise, and avarice bows down to its sordid shrine the lofty intellect made to grow strong in the illumination of the divine presence. The landmarks of faith are fast being swept away, where Protestantism has so shocked the intelligence that it has turned altogether from religion and from God.

Pilgrim, therefore, to a better land, soul made for the joys of truth, heart whose recesses no one but God can fill, why not come to the home of faith, where all is in harmony with the best instincts of thy nature,

where all shall guide thee to thy Maker, thy only rest? Time passes with lightning-like speed, and the shadows of thy grave already encompass thee. Eternity, long and endless, is before thee, where the harvest thou hast sown on earth must once and for ever be gathered. Why, then, hesitate to enter thy Father's house, where in plenteous mercy thy Redeemer shall meet thee, and open for thee the stores of His incorruptible wealth?

We are quite persuaded that there are many whose reasons are convinced, whose wills are not ready to follow the dictates of their intelligence. In matters of life, in the fluctuations of commerce, in the facts which depend upon human faith, they would act with far less evidence than that which the Catholic Church presents. But here the present seems to eclipse the future, early prejudices unhinge the reasoning powers, and

human ties hold them back from the great need of their souls. The old and changeless faith, which alone opens the portals of eternal truth, has a forbidding because a strange aspect. It bears the sternness of authority, to which they are not used, and touches, with tender but unflinching fingers, the wounds of sin, which the sufferer would fain conceal from himself. It offers no incense on the altar of human pride, nor makes account of wealth, or birth, or station. All must go to the hill of Calvary, and the leper must find the Jordan wherein he shall be cleansed. But tell us, immortal soul, if these be not the signs of more than human love, if humility be not the way to exaltation, if the kingdom be not promised to the meek and lowly! Are not earthly motives unworthy of the dignity of thy destiny, when they cloud the reason and shut out light from thy

vision? Do we not fall below our manhood when we refuse obedience to the dictates of our understanding, and despise the plain convictions of our conscience? Try the Catholic Church to which thy reason leads thee, and soon thou shalt find thyself at home, where there is no stern master to wield the power of a despot over thee, but a gentle mother to open every avenue of light, and guide thee in every way of purity.

The age in which we live is full of activity, and everywhere are marks of God's goodness. If there be confusion and disorder in the moral or political world, the Heavenly Spirit of peace is moving upon the chaos. The angels of evil are not the only ones who are reaping a harvest. The great Redeemer, God's only and well-beloved Son, is daily triumphing in many a battle, pouring light upon the earnest mind, and transforming

souls to His likeness. Faith must have its trials. It is not sight, it is "the evidence of things *unseen*." If, after all that God has done, and is still doing, for the Catholic Church, we are unwilling to believe, and ask for more evidence, are we not unjust to ourselves, and unreasonable toward our Creator? More He could not do, unless He were to work a miracle before our eyes. And even this would, perhaps, no more convince us than it did many of the Jews who saw and wondered, and then nailed to the cross the very hands that so many times brought benediction on them. So said our Lord, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."*

* St Luke xvi. 31.

LECTURES.



LECTURE I.



THE OFFICE OF REASON.

IT is the opinion of many persons well versed in the religious controversies of the day that we have reached that point when an appeal can be made to sound and unbiased reason, and that the claims of the Catholic Church need only to be made known to be recognized. The time was when all religious questions were prejudged, and the very name of "Catholic" was sufficient to insure condemnation. Arguments from any other quarter would be patiently listened to and duly

weighed, but the tenets of the ancient faith were ruled out of the field of discussion. The Protestant Reformation had produced this one result. It had not been able to bind together its adherents in any one creed, but it had succeeded in producing universal hostility to the church from which they seceded and from whose doctrine they revolted. Judaism and Mohammedanism had a better chance than that body which, for fifteen centuries, was the only representative of Christianity. This strange and unnatural state of things has, however, begun to pass away, the power of prejudice is not so absolute, and men are beginning to be willing to reason upon the great question for time and eternity.

To candid and sincere minds these lectures are addressed, and they are only asked to give to the subject proposed the attention

which it deserves. If the points of our argument are not established by just reasoning, then let them fall. If they are unanswerable, the true heart should not hesitate to follow the convictions of the understanding. In the matter of religion, self-deception is momentous in its issues. In questions of human science, men may reject the just conclusions, and only deprive themselves of a certain amount of knowledge; whereas wilful error in matters of faith may result in the ruin of the soul and the subversion of the end of its creation. "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Among the various objections to the Catholic religion, we meet with one which has great weight, and which is as untrue as it is specious. It is asserted that our faith is un-

reasonable, that it destroys the activity of the mind, and that no one can embrace it without resigning the just powers of reason. If this objection were real, it would be a sufficient answer to the highest pretensions of our faith. The whole cause would be settled. A religion which destroys reason cannot be from God; for all faith is proposed to intelligence, which cannot here be conceived of without perception and comparison. Moreover, one truth can never be disturbed by the introduction of another. That which is really true is as certain and invariable as God himself. If reason teaches us any truths, revelation cannot contradict them. We might then proceed to argue that the Catholic faith is not contrary to reason, by the careful examination of each one of its articles. But the more logical and conclusive way is to treat the subject from

its foundations, to retort the argument, and to prove the verity of our religion from reason itself. If it can be shown that the revelation of Christ to the world is only to be found in the Catholic and Roman Church, by arguments addressed to our natural intelligence, it will be impossible to establish the objection of unreasonableness against our creed or any of its parts.

We therefore bespeak the attention and candor of our hearers, promising to assume nothing but self-evident principles, and to draw no conclusions which are not logically contained in our premises. Truth is the proper object of intelligence, the great treasure for which every human mind should seek, and without which the loftiest gifts are only an accumulation of misery. In this course of lectures, we propose to arrive at our end by the careful examination of the

relations of Reason and Faith, by which we shall be able to demonstrate the necessary conditions of a revelation, and to establish the truth that the Catholic Church alone answers these conditions.

Our purpose this evening is to define clearly what is meant by Reason, and to show what its office is. This is of necessity the fundamental part of our argument ; for, among the religionists of our day, it is the source of much confusion, that men have no clear conceptions of the terms they use, nor of the propositions they affirm or deny. So in discussions the combatants are often fighting in the dark, accomplishing nothing by the contest, unless the excitement of angry passions, always unfavorable to reason. We humbly trust that no such excitement shall appear in the course of these lectures, and that no word shall be uttered except in the interest

of truth alone, which is the common property of all mankind, and for which we ought all to be willing to live and die.

We propose, then, to give a clear definition of Reason, to show what its natural powers are, the use which our Creator expects us to make of it, and the great evils which result from its abuse.

I.

By Reason generally taken, we understand that natural and essential faculty of the human mind, or that collection of faculties by which man knows the truth and judges concerning it, as far as that truth is contained within the powers of nature. This definition is quite simple. Man is an intelligent agent, gifted with the faculty of knowing and willing. Truth is the object of that intelligence,

and the truths of the natural order are in the field in which reason operates. Faith at once introduces supernatural truths on the authority of God revealing them; but of those we do not now speak, since we are considering man with the gifts which belong to him by nature alone.

II.

What, then, are the natural powers of this faculty of knowledge which all mankind confess we have, and the denial of which is an impossibility in logic? For the denial of such a faculty is the use of the very faculty denied; and if we can know nothing with certainty, we cannot comprehend the terms of an argument which such a denial implies. This faculty, then, has manifestly its limits. Man is not omniscient, and so can-

not know all things. Yet because there are limits to his understanding, it is none the less true that there are truths which he can know, and of which he cannot logically doubt.

Those who deny to reason its just powers are as much in error as those who ascribe to it a force beyond its capacity. There have been those who have taken the name of universal sceptics, who, asserting the incomprehensibility or inaccessibility of truth, profess to doubt of every thing; although in matters of common life they are inconsistent with their theories, since practically they follow the evidence of their senses, and even that of authority. Martin Luther and his first adherents denied the powers of reason by their doctrine of man's fall. Holding human nature to be utterly depraved, even in its essentials, by original sin, they not only denied the freedom of the will, but, moreover, asserted

that the intellect had become altogether unfit for the investigation of truth, so that, without the light of faith, no verity could be established, even in the natural order. A doctrine so untrue easily led to the opposite extreme, and it is not surprising to find the children of the original Protestants contending for the all-sufficiency of reason without faith. To any reflecting mind it must be evident that both these extreme opinions are false. It is wholly unphilosophical to suppose any essential depravation of our nature; since the loss of essentials really amounts to destruction. Reason must be fit to discern many truths, and is the subject to which any revelation must be addressed, while, from the finite nature of our being, it is plain that there are many things naturally unknown to us, which God, who knoweth all things, can, at His own pleasure, reveal to mankind.

This is not the place, in a popular lecture, to enter into any of the abstruse discussions which either aim to defend the propositions of pure philosophy or to refute the errors of infidelity. We pass at once, therefore, to the conclusion that there are many truths of the natural order which are fundamental, and which right reason can know with certitude without the aid of any supernatural revelation. These truths are such as the existence of God, the spirituality and immortality of the soul, and even the idea of rewards and punishments as involved in our moral government. The existence of God can even be proved by rigid demonstration, while every act of reason presupposes or implies it.

The finite world, with its admirable order and adaptation to its end, proves the existence of the Supreme Mind, which is the source of unity and beauty. Things dependent are

not self-existing, and therefore flow from the power of a Creator who must be in His nature omnipotent and all-sufficient. The human mind naturally sees this great primary truth, and, with the consciousness of its own existence and powers, turns at once to that Supreme Intelligence from whom all light comes, and for the knowledge of whom it was made. That men have depraved the idea of God, and have fallen into idolatry, is no argument against our proposition. The notion of a deity is universal; and the corruption of the primitive truth is owing to the influence of animal passions or the perversion of original traditions. Man has within him and around him full evidence of the being of one Supreme Creator, who is above all His works, and dependent upon none of them.

So argues even the Holy Spirit in the Book of Wisdom. "All men are vain in

whom there is not the knowledge of God ; and who, by these good things that are seen, could not understand Him that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman ; but have imagined either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and moon, to be the gods that rule the world. With whose beauty if they being delighted took them to be gods, let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they : for the first author of beauty made all those things. Or, if they admired their power and their effects, let them understand by them that He that made them is mightier than they. For by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the Creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby." *

* Wisdom xiii. 1-5.

Likewise, the Apostle St. Paul argues, in the Epistle to the Romans, that even reason convicts the idolater of folly. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those men that detain the truth of God in injustice: because that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God hath manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also and divinity: so that they are inexcusable." *

It is not necessary for our present purpose to dwell longer upon this point. The knowledge of God's existence is so evident to the naturally-guided reason that without it we can be certain of no truth whatever, and, if we have not the certitude of this primary

* E. Romans i. 18-20.

verity, we cannot conceive of such a thing as revelation, which depends entirely upon the character and attributes of God. Some other truths which are connected with our relation to the Supreme Mind are also discernible by the powers of nature. Reason comprehends the difference between matter and spirit, understands how the faculty of knowing and willing is a simple faculty which cannot belong to a composed substance, and from the spirituality of the soul argues even its immortality. The idea also of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood, is inherent in our understanding, and, in a more or less perfect state, is universal to mankind. Conscience would otherwise have no power, and human laws no sanction in the established consent of all nations, heathen or Christian. Such truths as these the individual reason perceives with full certi-

tude; it at once beholds the evidence they bring, and acts upon them with as complete persuasion as upon the instincts of the animal nature or the testimony of the senses. Because the mercy of God has made us a revelation, and supernatural grace has interposed, the condition of man in the natural order is not thereby changed. Reason has its field, its vision, and its laws, and those who are left to its light alone are responsible to their Maker for the use of that light. All men have an idea of the Supreme Being; are conscious of their own moral agency, which is implied in the very notion of right and wrong, and acknowledge, implicitly at least, God's moral government. They must stand or fall, therefore, in the eyes of the Omniscient Judge, by their obedience or disobedience to the voice of conscience. If they give themselves up to the cravings of

animal passion, and degrade themselves to the level of the brutes, and bow down in idolatry before gods of wood and stone, reason, as well as St. Paul, declares them inexcusable. If, with the light of a revelation all around them, they refuse the evidence of a divine interposition, and even close their understandings to the first principles which nature teaches, confuse the very notion of God, or exalt themselves to an equality with Him, they not only turn their intelligence from the source of light, but deserve the anger of their Creator. Can there be a greater impiety than to deny Him from whom all things proceed, whose service is not only the joy but the duty of every intelligent agent; and, shutting the eyes to the teachings of both reason and revelation, to fall down in the darkness of doubt and unbelief?

III.

Gifted then with reason and its powers, possessed of the knowledge of such important truths, what use does our Creator expect us to make of the faculties which He has given us? It is self-evident that none of His works are without an end.

He has made us of body and soul, and has given us our senses and understanding. These are to be used, and for the purpose for which He gave them to us, according to the light which we have. Suffering follows sooner or later the transgression of any natural laws. He who will not trust the testimony of his senses is worse than a fool. Sharp pain and even death may be the result of such wilful blindness. Yet we are as much bound to use our reason and to follow its guidance

as to use the knowledge which our senses give us. As well might we disobey the instincts of nature and refuse our bodies the food they demand, or despise the laws of gravitation and seek to walk upon the air or the waves of the sea, as to deny the just conclusions of our reason and substitute in their place the fictions of imagination. As we are moral agents, we cannot be held excusable for the infraction of the laws of nature, or the principles written in our minds by an All-Wise Creator. Let us see, then, what we are bound to do with that intelligence which God has given us, and how far we are accountable.

1. No one can deny that truth is the one object of our understanding; that we have a natural longing for it, even as we have for happiness. Falsehood is not knowledge, and will never satisfy the craving of our

minds. There are two ways of obtaining knowledge—that of the external senses, which testify truly as to things within their observation; and that of the reason, which also gives us certain evidence when rightly used. In the order of experience we are perhaps first conscious of our own existence, then of other dependent existences, and through them of that great independent and necessary being from whom all things proceed. This truth we apprehend more or less clearly in every intelligent act. The faithful use of this knowledge is not only our duty, but is also our only happiness. Here is the fountain from which flow all other truths. The idea of God as one supreme, self-existing, and all-perfect being contains full food for our highest faculties. If in the order of fact we know creatures and ourselves first, in the order

of being we know our God as the source of our life and the light of our intellect. A supreme being such as our reason shows to us must be endowed with all perfections. An imperfect God is in reality no God at all, since we can at once think of something superior to that which is not absolutely perfect. Here, then, we have in the view of the Deity, all knowledge, all goodness, and all power. Nothing can surpass the force of His intellect, nothing can be beyond His power, and His will must necessarily be the law of all sanctity. To such a great and glorious being we owe obedience, and in our consciousness of right and wrong we find the sanctions of the law He has impressed upon our hearts. Thus far certainly reason can go; and when we find men covering this primary truth with irrational superstitions, or forgetting it in

the falsehoods of paganism and idolatry, we find them really disobeying the voice of reason, and by the corruption of nature and the demands of passion transgressing its laws. We have heard the voice of St. Paul declaring such transgressors to be inexcusable.

2. But reason can go further than this, and come into a nearer relation with God. It can receive a revelation from Him, and be an unerring judge of the motives of credibility. To the reason God reveals Himself. To the brute creation He speaks not. That reason, certain of His existence and cognizant of His ability to reveal, can therefore hear the voice of God and distinguish it from every other voice; for the Divine Mind which proposes a revelation is bound to give unerring proofs of His interposition, and of these proofs reason is a competent

judge. No unreasonable obedience is demanded either of our reasons or of our hearts. Miracles, being a deviation from the natural laws, and even a transgression of them, are a certain proof of divine power which can never be used on the side of falsehood. Prophecies being the announcement of future events, known only to God, must necessarily come from Him. Miracles appear to the senses, and if we do not see them ourselves, we can examine the testimony of others, and make ourselves sure that they are intelligent and competent witnesses. Prophecies are verified by the event, and we are perfectly able to judge of their genuineness. These motives of credibility, when laid before us, impose upon us an obligation which we cannot avoid. We are bound to examine them and to follow with impartiality the deductions of reason.

All the truths, then, of revelation are addressed to our understanding. We cannot weigh them in the balance of reason, because, being in the supernatural order, they are above reason; but we can assure ourselves that God has spoken, and, if certain of this, yield an implicit obedience to Him who of necessity knoweth all things. If we do not do this, we act unreasonably, and follow pride or prejudice instead of the dictates of intelligence. The Church of Christ, if it be that He has established one, must come to us with evidence which satisfies our reason, and like any other truth be sustained by proofs of the divine interposition. As God spake by patriarchs and prophets, and gave visible and unmistakable signs of His power; as He sanctioned the law of Moses by wonders in heaven and on earth, and moved before the camp of Israel in a

pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, so must He, speaking in these last days by His Son, give the tokens of divine might and high knowledge such as belong to no creature.

We do not say that these proofs which are demanded shall convict every understanding, and leave no probation for the moral agent, no trial for the understanding. But we do say that they are sufficient to convict every sincere mind, and that they who heed them not are closing their eyes to the testimony of reason itself. Under the order of nature as of grace, the freedom of the will remains intact, and God accepts only a willing service, for none other has any merit in His sight. Behold, then, the great and noble field of reason which in these lectures we propose to make manifest. Here is the light of God shining in our

intellects, and leading us to Himself, as well in the fainter beams of the morning as in the full splendor of noon-day. And wherever He leads us, it is to the possession of truth, where there can be no contradiction or shadow of change. Everywhere there is harmony; as in the great universe with its million wonders, so in the mind of man formed in His image, and made to know, love, and enjoy Him.

IV.

Much time need not be spent to show the evils which flow from the abuse of reason. They are too self-evident, and in the history of our race have been abundantly manifest. When man, acting against right reason, desires or attempts to deny the existence of God, what has he gained for him-

self? He has contradicted the voice of nature, and has excluded the loftiest and purest conceptions from his intellect. There have been those who have said that there was no God, and who have lived as if there were no All-seeing Judge. It is to be doubted if any have ever really believed so monstrous and unreasonable a creed. The stings of conscience, and the fears of retribution even in the life beyond the grave, have left them little peace. But if it were possible for the soul to banish from itself the idea of its Creator, what a blank and cheerless life would follow! Where is the power of reason to control passion, and where are the sanctions of the law of right and wrong? There ceases to be any right or wrong. Man becomes like the brutes, only worse and more degraded than they, because they blindly follow instinct, while he pros-

titutes his intelligence to plan crime and meditate upon its attractions. To what untold horrors may he not descend who has thrown off the restraints of reason, and banished the idea of his accountability to a Supreme Intelligence!

Not only have they denied God who have in word and deed refused to believe in His existence, but they also are practical atheists who have made Him less than He is, have confused Him with creatures, or have rejected any of His attributes. What has been the result of that absurd and unreasonable doctrine which makes every thing that is to be God, or every creature to be only a real or apparent emanation from Him? Is it not to deny God to take away His perfections, and make Him dependent and changeable like the creature? Is it not against all reason to deny the testimony

of our senses and the voice of our inward consciousness? Pantheism in any form destroys the divine nature, which it identifies with man and with the universe, thus robbing the one self-existing Being of His attributes, and inducing the necessity of constant evolutions of the divine substance. Such a God ceases to bear the marks of divinity, and ceases to command the respect of creatures who become his equals. Let the historian tell of the immorality which has flowed from such tenets, but let no one but the sufferer tell of the darkness of understanding and unrest of soul which are the consequence of disobedience to the voice of reason. Any theory—be it pantheism, materialism, or fatalism—which shuts out the truth of God's existence and His providence in the universe, is the degradation of man and all his higher faculties

Man has the power so to degrade himself. There is no light so strong that he cannot refuse to see it. Our first parents cast themselves from Eden, with all its treasures, and we, their children, can likewise turn the fair world into the prison of our misery, and the lights of our reason into false beacons which point us the way to destruction.

So again, what end has man to serve if he blind himself to the beams of revelation, when that revelation addresses his understanding with unerring proofs? If God has made special provisions for mankind, and by particular grace has called us to a higher destiny than that to which our nature entitles us, do we not terribly wrong ourselves when we shut our reason to the proofs of such an economy of mercy? Let reason act freely and with sincerity in the search for truth; let not passion or prejudice

blind the eye; and the Hand which made us will guide us to our end. It is a singular fact that Christianity preserves philosophy and vindicates the teachings of right reason, while those who have refused to follow the natural light to the portals of revelation have at last denied even the truths which are plainly deducible from the page of nature.

All is lost when once obedience is refused to the convictions of conscience. There have been deniers of reason and its attributes in former days, before the bright beams of an Incarnate God—Sun of righteousness and truth—shone upon the world. The principles of philosophy have been denied, and theories inconsistent and self-destructive have been set up to mislead the minds of men. But what was this blindness compared to that of those who now refuse the

just conclusions of their own understanding, and limit the knowledge and power of the Supreme Mind, the law of whose existence requires that He should be omniscient and omnipotent?

Here, then, we come to the conclusion of our first lecture. Reason has its office and duty, and the light of God shines upon it. It is able to know the Divine Hand which formed it, and to comprehend, at least in some degree, the relations which subsist between the Creator and the creature. It is able to judge of the motives of credibility, and capable of communication with God. And whatever the sovereign mercy proposes to do with man, we may rest assured that the first principles of our nature will never be violated, that no revelation will ever contradict the teachings of reason. With the Divine Artificer there is no contradiction, no

change of plan ; and if the intelligent creature is to be raised to a higher sphere, and one day advanced to the knowledge and enjoyment of his Maker's presence, it shall be in an unclouded day, and with all the forces of reason intact, with freedom of will, and a nature elevated but not impaired.





LECTURE II.



RELATIONS OF REASON AND FAITH.

IN our last lecture we examined carefully, though briefly, the nature and office of reason, and sought to establish that which it is able to know and that which it is bound to confess. We proceed this evening to speak of faith, and to see if there be any thing in it inconsistent with our natural faculties. Our demonstration will be very simple, and such as we trust shall meet with the conviction of every sincere inquirer.

Let us consider the true meaning of faith,

the sphere of its exercise, its perfect consistency with reason, the right use of reason in connection with faith, and, lastly, the abuse of reason to its own injury and the destruction of faith.

I.

Faith is an act of the human mind, giving a willing assent to the truths which are divinely revealed on the authority of God, who reveals them. To such an act the will is prevented and assisted by divine grace, which is a supernatural help, interfering not at all with its freedom, but guiding and enlightening it. No argument need be used to show that God, being of necessity infinite, is far above His creatures; that there are many truths beyond our sphere of knowledge, and that the Divine Mind, who know-

eth all things, is able to make known to us what He will. To deny this is to deny the being of God, or to make creatures equal to Him, which, in other words, is the same thing. Neither is there any thing incomprehensible in the idea of grace, since it is only that influence which the Author of all truth is able to exert upon the intelligent agent without the least injury to its freedom. It would be strange, considering the attributes of God, especially His goodness, if He did not thus show love to the works of His hand, and seek to help them. The distinction between faith and the knowledge acquired by reason is manifold. Faith proceeds from the *principle* of grace which assists nature, while the knowledge of reason proceeds from nature exercising its intelligence. The *object* of faith is that truth, or that complexion of truths, which are revealed in a super-

natural manner; while the *object* of knowledge is that truth which man, by the exercise of his own powers, is able to acquire. The *formal motive* of faith is the authority of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, while the truths of the natural order are admitted by the force of evidence or demonstration. The *end* of faith is to elevate man, and dispose him to a knowledge and fruition of God to which nature does not entitle him; while by reason and science he cannot attain to any thing more than an abstract knowledge and natural love of his Maker.

In this statement there is nothing repugnant to the principles of reason as we have explained them. Man is a moral agent, bound to use the light he has for the end of his being. There is no argument which can be adduced against the possibility of a

revelation, and consequently against the exercise of faith. On the contrary, as we shall see in the next lecture, it is possible from reason alone to argue the probability of a special divine interposition. The only question is one of fact. Has God made a revelation, or has He not? Has man any other light to guide him than the simple light of nature? Have the proofs of a revelation, which reason requires, been given? On the supposition that they have been given, then faith comes into exercise; and the truths which, through divine impulse, it receives on the authority of God revealing them, in no way conflict with the teachings of nature. They cannot do so for two very obvious reasons. God Himself is the teacher of all truth, both in nature and in revelation; and, secondly, reason can be no judge of facts entirely above the natural order.

II.

The sphere in which faith is exercised is, then, confessedly a supernatural one. All depends upon the fact that God has been pleased to hold communication with our race in order to guide and elevate it to a supernatural destiny.

Those truths which He has condescended to reveal are the object of faith, and nothing else. The proofs of a revelation are offered to the understanding, and lead the honest mind to conviction. Even more, the intellect cannot reject the evidence of these proofs without at the same time rejecting the first principles of reason, and falling into universal doubt, which is an irrational condition of mind. Yet no one can be surprised that, in an order transcending the powers of nature, in a merciful interposi-

tion of the Divine Being, the act of faith should also require the assistance of grace, and so become supernatural. Where nature ends and grace begins no one can tell; for God has never left man without the aid of this blessed influence, and perhaps there is no one who has been left to the resources of pure nature. Moreover, the beams of a revelation have from the creation enlightened the earth, and have in greater or lesser degree pervaded the world. In every land, even in the superstitions of paganism, are to be found the traditions of early truth, and the evidence that man, made in the image of God, has been called from the beginning to a high destiny. The supernatural character of faith is manifest from the certitude which it gives, and which far surpasses that of demonstration. All men are not able to reason pro-

foundly, and yet here unlearned and simple peasants may have the knowledge of truths transcending the powers of reason, and hold them with a certitude surpassing that of the proudest philosophers. It is reasonable that it should be so, that nature should lead to God, and that His greater light should produce the most profound conviction. He who would believe from the motives of credibility alone would only assent to that which he sees, while faith, to use inspired language, is "the evidence of things that appear not." Philosophy gives its voice and leads to assurance but in its own order, while its highest office is to guide the soul to the feet of its great Creator, where the words of the divine voice are heard, and where every shadow of doubt is chased from the understanding. Who can know, if God knoweth not; and, when I am certain of

His voice, have I not an assurance far beyond any mere natural certitude? Even the miracles by which the Christian religion has been established are to be viewed in a two-fold light. As motives of credibility they rely upon human authority, because, appealing to our senses and reason, they exhibit unmistakably the presence of divine power; but as objects of faith, they demand likewise a supernatural assent on the authority of God. It is one thing for me to believe, from sufficient testimony, that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and to argue therefrom to His divinity, and another to move in love and devotion to the risen Saviour, whose victory over death is the cause of my justification.

Yet the act of faith, though made by the aid of divine grace, and in the light of evidence which moves the mind to conviction,

interferes in no respect with the freedom of the will, but is a free act of a moral agent, and, therefore, meritorious before God. "By faith," says St. Paul, "the ancients obtained a testimony." The evidence is extrinsic and mediate. We see the motives of credibility, and not the thing revealed. One is the vision of faith, and another that of sight; one our probation in this pilgrimage, and another our reward in that land of the blessed where we shall see as we are seen. These motives of credibility do not give a metaphysical evidence like that of mathematics, but a moral evidence which the rightly disposed mind ought to receive, but which does not of necessity produce assent. Herein is the trial of man, and here the just and sincere are made manifest. Man cannot ask of God to see with the natural eye the glories of heaven,

nor to gaze with an unclouded understanding upon the truths revealed. He takes the word of his Maker, sufficiently authenticated to him; he believes it, and by that faith is daily led to a nearer and brighter view of Him who is the fountain of all light and truth. Grace crowns the powers of nature and leads them to their perfection. "We are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is."*

From what we have said it will also be seen that the light which faith gives in no way obscures that of reason. The same truths may be the object of science and of faith. Reason may establish by de-

* First Epistle St. John, 3 : 2.

monstration the existence of God and His attributes, the spirituality of the soul, the accountability of the creature to the Creator, involved in a moral government, and revelation may likewise propose to us these same primary truths; yet, while in the former case we are called to admit the just conclusions of argument, in the latter we are persuaded to believe on the authority of the divine veracity, which has spoken and given its infallible assurance. Certain is the truth which reason teaches me, but the voice of God gives me grace to exercise a higher act of my soul. It is the same sun which lights my path in the morning twilight as in the blaze of noon, but greater is the effulgence of mid-day than the faint beams of the dawn. We, then, here behold the sphere of faith. It is a supernatural act, directed to truths revealed

in a supernatural manner through the pure and voluntary mercy of God. It is not opinion, for opinion gives no certitude. It rises above the evidence of reason, and opens the spiritual eyes to a vision more assuring than that of sense—to the light which comes from the uncreated sun of truth.

III.

Faith, as thus explained and operating in its proper sphere, cannot be inconsistent with reason, since there cannot be any contradiction. Faith never extinguishes the light of right reason, nor even opposes it; but, on the contrary, wonderfully enlarges it, and adds to the stock of natural knowledge.

1. Faith does not demand from our understandings a blind assent, thus putting reason altogether out of the way. The ser-

vice of religion is a reasonable one, to use the very words of Holy Scripture, and any other notion of it is an erroneous one. God gives us the proofs of His revelation, and we are to judge them, and see that the evidence is sufficient and such as would lead us to action in all the ordinary affairs of human life. Besides, the object to be believed must be in some manner manifest to the mind. It need not be comprehended, nor could the conditions of an infinite being be comprehended by a finite mind; but the truth proposed must be clearly stated to the reason. For example, by evidence which satisfies me, (and there can be such evidence,) I learn the nature of God's being, that He is one God in three distinct persons. I do not understand how this is, and why should I wonder that I cannot fathom the law of the Divine Being? But I can conceive perfectly what is

meant by the term "trinity." My reason does not oppose it nor furnish any difficulty. It would contradict the idea of three human persons in one human being, but it has no data for opposition to the idea of three divine persons in one God. So, while blind assent is not asked, the truth proposed to belief is also stated in a reasonable manner, so that the intellect may clearly seize it, and it is so proposed that the man who rejects it is unreasonable.

2. We have already, by the course of our definitions, anticipated the assertion which we now make, that no truth proposed by faith can be in contradiction to the teachings of right reason. It cannot be that one truth should be opposed to another. Truth is certain, and whatever contradicts it is not truth. God is the author of truth, and the light both of reason and revelation.

He alone proposes whatever is to be believed, the things evident to the mind in the natural order, and the facts which come to our knowledge through the extraordinary way of revelation. How can He contradict Himself? The great verities which may be known by the light of nature revealed religion has placed in a clearer light, while the new truths which it has brought us, being beyond us, are not subject to our reasoning powers. The enunciation of mysteries is no contradiction. There are mysteries in nature, in the laws of our own being, in the conditions of animal and vegetable life. Because we see not how the plant germinates from the seed, nor how food supports bodily life, we doubt not the fact. We make faithful use of our spring-time, and neglect not the craving of our appetites. Much more reasonably do we expect mysteries in the

nature of the infinite, and in our relations to Him who is far above us. As has been often said, if we could comprehend God, He would cease to be God. While, then, the inquirer is asked to weigh carefully the proofs of revelation, the motives of credibility, and even the claims of the authority which proposes to teach us, it would be contrary to all right reason to take up the dogmas of Christianity and bring them to the tribunal of private judgment. For such a course would be to suppose that the verities of religion are in their nature and relations within the capacity of unaided reason, and, if this were the case, a revelation would be useless and futile. Secondly, it would make God contradict Himself and propose to us divine mysteries in an extraordinary manner, when, after all, they are either by the supposition nothing more than truths of

nature, or are untrue and repugnant in themselves.

3. While, therefore, the true mind can find no difficulty in accepting a revelation properly authenticated, it is evident, from facts which need no proof, that religion is the fosterer of science and art, and the handmaid of all true human progress. Why should not the light which comes from God, and illuminates our pathway to the grave, and even through the valley of death, to the end of our being, lift up our souls to the high sense of their destiny? How can the Word of God be idle in our minds? Is it not a quickening power, pervading every part of our spiritual nature? In the bright sunlight more perfectly come forth the outlines of land and sea. In the clearer knowledge of revelation more manifestly appear the truths of natural science. And while the intellect

is raised to the view of the great First Cause, its faculties are enlarged, and its capacities seem to grow by the truth on which they feed. And the history of man is a sufficient reply to all who deny our proposition. Where have we found the greatest advance in art and science, except in the guidance of revealed knowledge? Where the mightiest efforts of human learning but under the protection of Christianity? Religion has been the teacher of mankind, even in the things that pertain to our temporal welfare, the mother of true civilization, the teacher of nobility in science, of beauty in art. So connected now with the triumphs of human learning is the Christian religion that every scholar, even the sceptical philosopher, lives in her light, and is not wholly in darkness by reason of her gracious beams.

IV.

The conclusions of our lecture will become more evident if we examine, for a moment, the sphere of reason under the influence of revealed religion. Vain and absurd is the theory which would lay aside the reason when once we enter under the dominion of faith, or make the authority of revelation take the place of our natural powers. Such a substitution would be an impossibility in fact, and would destroy that reasonable service which God asks of the intelligent agent. Here, then, we say that it is the office of reason to know and examine the foundations of faith, to accept the truths proposed, and even to defend them against the unbeliever as the great treasure of the mind, and the protection against the misery of doubt and scepticism.

1. As truths supernatural are proposed on the authority of God, it is the office of reason to examine well the motives of credibility, and to know with surety that it is the voice of God which speaks, and no counterfeit of divine testimony. All these foundations of faith are as much the object of careful research to the believer as to the inquirer who seeks, for the first time, the evidences of religion. They are, as it were, the solid columns on which rests the divine fabric of revelation, and the heart, enlightened by the strong assurance of faith, is able to know how firmly built is the house of God, how it rests upon the undeniable principles of our nature. For its own greater knowledge of the harmony of the divine works, for the conviction of the doubting, for the conversion of the unbeliever, the reason loves to show how unanswerable are the proofs of Chris-

tianity. God demands nothing unreasonable of an intelligent agent. He does not treat us as if we were machines operating by blind force, but to the eye that was made for such a bright vision He discloses the perfections of His ways, parting the clouds that veil His throne, and showing to the admiring soul something of His glory. "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands. Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge."* If God has not given such proofs of His interposition, we cannot be asked to believe. Without motives sufficient to induce the unprejudiced reason to assent, we could not go into the earth "to preach the Gospel to every creature," to "make known the way of God upon earth, His sal-

* Psalm xviii. 1-2.

vation in all nations." We, therefore, shrink not from the lists of fair and logical discussion ; we are prepared to meet the objector on the principles of reason, and to convict him of the claims of religion, if he will be just and sincere. We take up what nature teaches, and, on the common ground, we are ready to defend the truths supernaturally revealed. We ask no man to accept the Catholic creed unless we can show him proofs greater and stronger than he would demand for immediate conviction in any affair of human life. Here the great learning of the doctors of the Church has made itself manifest, and all the sciences and every power of art have been made to enlighten the way of divine mercy upon earth. All that is true, beautiful, or good is from God, and all returns in praise to the Fountain of Light, whose honor is the highest joy of the

universe. "O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is Thy name in the whole earth. For Thy magnificence is elevated above the heavens."*

2. The intellect of man is the subject to which the truths of revelation are proposed. As the beauties of nature are exposed to the eye, that man, seeing them, may adore the Maker of all, so the intelligent reason was framed for the knowledge of truth, which is its rightful food. Fortified by proofs unanswerable of the divine interposition, and assisted by grace which elevates the act of assent to the voice of authority, it receives each and all of the objects of faith, understands what is revealed, and is able to explain the dependence of one verity upon another in the admirable harmony which distinguishes

* Psalm viii. 1-2.

all the divine operations. It is able to show how each part of the fabric strengthens and sustains the whole, how wonderfully revealed religion replies to the wants of our being, and how, with more than maternal tenderness, the Almighty Hand has supplied the earnest desires of our souls. And though it cannot tear away the mystery which the being and plans of the Infinite must necessarily wear to the created intellect, yet day after day develops new beauty, and the sun of truth upon which we gaze grows brighter unto the upright eye.

3. Reason has yet a further privilege and a nobler duty. It can enter into the arena of controversy, and return with the laurels of victory. It can force the unbeliever to admit the claims of religion, or drive him from the ground of natural light to the darkness of universal doubt and the dishonesty of scepti-

cism. It can take up the claims of that authority by which God upholds His revelation, and demonstrate the insincerity and blindness of those who refuse to acknowledge them. Man can refuse assent to the conclusions of his reason, but he has no right to do so. The objector moves the point of his attack, and ever changes his ground. Now he aims at the authority on which the dogmas of faith are taught, and again at the dogmas themselves. Reason rightly guided is ever ready for the conflict, and retorts the arguments of the adversary, and is able to overcome him by his own weapons. The great mysteries of religion, though beyond the ken of our unaided powers, contradict no law of nature, and only establish the attributes of God. Moreover, with the force of testimony arrayed in favor of revelation, the authority of reason itself is at stake; and he who will not

believe the word of his Maker, properly attested, how can he still believe in his own understanding? The truths of the natural order come to us with sufficient evidence, but in the facts of the supernatural order we have even stronger evidence, and more unmistakable proof. How shall he who rejects the greater accept the lesser testimony? History comes again to our aid, and gives her solemn warning. They who have denied the voice of God in revelation have consistently learned to reject the voice of God in nature. While religion ever has defended the tenets of a pure philosophy, the disbelievers in the supernatural have cast off the restraints of reason, and in doubt and disputation have forsaken the first principles of truth. The supreme First Cause has been degraded from His throne and man made His equal, and the dark problems of sin,

sorrow, and death remain unsolved to taunt the misery of the sceptic or testify against the sincerity of his professions. He who has no reason for believing in any thing believes in nothing, can have no confidence in himself, confesses that both his senses and his reason are deceivers. Happier, indeed, is the animal life, with its present joys and brief sorrows, where there is no prospect of a future.

v.

As man, under the light of mere nature, is able to pervert his powers, and prostitute his understanding to the denial of God, and of the distinction between right and wrong; so, under the beams of a revelation whose light has pervaded the world, he can likewise turn from the clearer voice of truth, and use his faculties to subvert the plans of divine mercy.

St. Paul has told us that they who hold the truth of God in insincerity and ungodliness are inexcusable, "because, when they knew God, they have not glorified him as God, or given thanks, but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and they changed the image of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things. Wherefore, God gave them up unto the desires of their heart, unto uncleanness, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever."* Much more inexcusable are they who, admitting the presence of a supernatural authority, are disobedient to its

* E. Romans i. 21-5.

voice, and, perverting reason to a use to which it is not entitled, destroy logically the foundations of both natural and revealed religion. Such are the disciples of private judgment in our own day, who, professing to bring all dogmas within the scope of their own powers, are recreant to the first principles of reason. We have seen, in our brief summary, not only what man can do under the light of nature, but what he is bound to do. God is confessedly greater than His creatures; He knoweth all things, and is able to communicate of His knowledge to His intelligent creation. Reason judges, as it must, of the proofs by which it is established that God is speaking. When those proofs are satisfactory, man has no alternative but to hear and obey. He cannot logically question the authority which is so well authenticated, and he must, if he will be a rational being, give

his assent to the truths proposed on such authority. The adherents to the theory of private judgment disregard the force of testimony, and submit to the individual mind the question as to every dogma of revelation. They ask not, Has God spoken, and are such His words? Is the authority on which such truths rest a reliable one? Such inquiries are justly within the province of reason. But they ask, Is the doctrine taught consonant with the judgment of each individual? Each one becomes the arbiter in matters divine. Sinai, with its fire and cloud, has no lessons. The cross and open sepulchre of Christ teach nothing. God's word is to be submitted to the individual reason, there to be weighed in the puny balances of man's understanding. One finds it reasonable to believe that there is a life beyond the grave, and that the body which is resolved to dust

shall one day rise again. Another finds such a notion to be contrary to the transformations of matter which daily take place, and so laughs to scorn the doctrine of a resurrection. In the scheme of such philosophers, it is nothing that our Lord Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God, and worked mighty miracles to prove His claims. His words are disbelieved, or taken to be explained away as the opinion of mere man. "Wonder not, for the hour cometh when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."* By this process, which is applied to every revealed doctrine, faith is utterly destroyed. Man no longer believes on the authority of God, and

* St. John v. 25-9.

if he retain any truth in the supernatural order, it is ostensibly on the ground of its reasonableness to the individual, and therefore is only a matter of opinion. This theory of private judgment is nothing more than practical scepticism. It destroys the principles of credibility. It subjects the truths of the Divine Being to the limits of man's understanding, and ends by the logical conclusion of extinguishing both the light of revelation and of nature.

1. The motives of credibility depend upon principles which are evident to reason. A thing cannot be and not be at the same moment. The Creator is of a higher order than the creature. Miracles transcending our nature prove the presence of the power which made nature. The testimony of the senses is to be relied upon, if not in every individual case, certainly in the case of many

and competent witnesses. He who subjects all the truths of religion to his own private judgment denies in effect all these principles, and by his creed God Himself can bring no evidence to which he will yield. A prophet may rightly foretell future events, or in his presence heal the sick, or raise the dead to life, and yet, in spite of all, he will not accept such testimony. The word must be weighed, not in the light of its intelligibility, but of its intrinsic credibility. To such a theorist there can be no authority, since God Himself is none. There are no marks to attest the foot-prints of Almighty power, no proof which can authenticate the divine word.

2. Nothing is more self-evident than that the infinite cannot be comprehended by the finite. Is it not, then, degrading to the level of the creature the majesty of heaven to take the truths proposed by a well-attested reve-

lation, and submit them to the examination of the individual judgment? Can I be a judge where I know nothing? Can the blind be the judges of the varied hue of flowers, or the deaf of the concordance of sweet sounds? Can my reason furnish me any data by which I can weigh the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God? I know something of human nature, though by no means every thing; but what do I know of the laws of the Divine Being? I see before me only a man like myself, with beauty, perhaps, far surpassing that of the sons of men; still, I see only a creature. He goes about the earth like a beggar, and at last hangs upon a cross between two thieves. Yet am I to be governed by my mortal eyes and my frail reason, and when He declares Himself to be God, the consubstantial Word of the Father, by whom all things were made, and

when I see Him raise the dead in proof of His divinity, am I to say I will not believe? Am I to reason that it is intrinsically impossible that God should become man, or that the divine and human natures should be united in one person, when, to say the least, I argue blindly, without a full knowledge of the terms I imply? I am a judge of the extrinsic credibility, that is, of the proofs which induce me to believe; but how can I be a judge of the intrinsic credibility of a doctrine whose proportions reach beyond the bounds of my vision? Jesus of Nazareth, whom I see only as a man, must give me the evidence that he is more than man. Of this I am the judge. I behold it myself, or I receive it on the testimony of others who are too numerous and too competent to be deceived. Here my reason is satisfied, and leads my heart to cry out, "Lord, I believe."

3. Finally, if I am to sift every dogma proposed to my acceptance on a supernatural authority, and try the mysteries of religion by pure reason, then for me there is and can be no revelation. God cannot bring down the facts of His being to my level, and He can give me no proofs which are strong enough to convince me. Let us take the facts of Christianity as an evidence, and, whatever any one may be disposed to admit, these facts are too well known to be denied. "Their words have gone unto the ends of the earth, and their sound into all the earth."

Christianity has always proposed certain dogmas on a divine authority. They have been shown to contradict neither history nor philosophy. When the blow was successfully struck at the principle of authority, and the several parts of the Christian creed

were brought to the individual reason, that their intrinsic credibility might be determined, then fell the fabric of faith, and tower after tower of the sacred edifice crumbled to the dust. With such reformers Christ Himself soon ceased to be divine, and, therefore, no teacher, no law-giver. First, the Bible was the religion of Protestants; then, as the world understood that a book subjected to individual interpretation could be no rule of faith, the sacred Scripture have ceased to hold authority; for they, too, are subject to the same private judgment, and bear to many minds no sufficient evidence of inspiration. So, in our enlightened day, the reformers, returning from the demolition of revealed religion, have not even left untouched the temple of reason itself. In the degradation of the Supreme Being, in the obstinate rejection

of testimony, they have subverted the laws of evidence, and have brought back the darkness of scepticism, to which drear and irrational philosophy many burdened consciences have become willing converts. Cicero and Plato would put to shame many of the bright intellects of our day.

How natural is the transition! When I have sufficient proofs of a divine interposition, I will not believe. I shut my eyes to the voice of miracles, to the language of prophecy, to the great facts which stand out on the page of history, to the inward cravings of my nature. Am I not travelling in the way which leads to atheism, where I will confess no truth, where I may say that man liveth in deceit, the victim of a skilful lie, the central figure of a panorama of falsehood? Is it my great Creator, who cannot communicate with me, to

whom I consider myself an equal? Where, when the force of human testimony is rejected, are my sources of knowledge? Living to myself, and dying to myself, would I not like to obliterate from my conscience all sense of right and wrong, all fear of accountability to an omniscient judge? Alas! I strive in vain. Reason awakes me in my dream; I beat against the bars of my cage, but they yield not, and I am a prisoner still. Captive shall I be till I am true to the instincts of my nature, willing to believe in God, anxious to hear His voice, and ready at once to obey it. Then shall my fetters be broken, then shall I fear no evil, then shall the light of the Lord shine upon me, then shall the field of knowledge open its boundless treasures to my understanding. "In Thy light shall I see light."



LECTURE III.



CONDITIONS OF REVELATION.

IT has been impossible to avoid some repetitions in the definitions we have made of reason and faith, and in the explanation of their relations. We have also been obliged to anticipate the subject of this lecture, and to speak of the consequences of a revelation before treating scientifically of its nature and evidence. All that has been said is, however, of the highest importance in our argument, and must be kept in mind during the course of this evening's lecture.

Our present purpose is to define what is

meant by a revelation; to show that such an interposition on the part of God is possible, and even necessary for the good of our race; to examine the proof by which such a revelation must be authenticated; and, lastly, to state certain conditions which are essential to the preservation of truths revealed.

I.

By revelation we understand an immediate manifestation of divine power by which certain truths exceeding the capacity of our natural faculties are made known to man. All the parts of this definition are important. God alone can teach us in regard to things above nature, and, if He pleases to make any such manifestation, it must be attended by signs of divine power. The truths revealed are beyond the scope of our

reason, since otherwise there would be no need of any extraordinary method of instruction. It is also quite evident that the knowledge thus imparted is of the greatest value to our whole race. It is, indeed, possible for God to make known to an individual facts and circumstances which concern him specially. Yet general truths, which affect the entire race, are of the same importance to all mankind. Every member of the human family has the same interest in these truths, for they are the lights which guide men to their ultimate end. Any revelation, therefore, of supernatural truths must be for the benefit of the whole world.

In regard to the mode in which such a divine manifestation shall take place, we cannot fix any bounds to the liberty or power of God. Undoubtedly, as He is addressing men, He will follow the ordinary laws of in-

telligence. It is not likely that He will address every individual mind and pour upon it an extraordinary illumination. Such a course would not be in accordance with the social order which His hand has established, and by which we are aggregated together as the members of one family, nation, or race. It would also take away to a great extent the use of our liberty in the trial of faith, since, seeing by supernatural light acting directly upon the intellect, we would not need to examine the extrinsic motives of credibility, and the logical order of knowledge would be subverted. We do not say that God could not do this, and at the same time leave intact all the attributes of our nature; but we do say that such a course on His part is neither probable nor necessary. Judging by the ordinary facts of experience, we should expect that He would

employ some instrumentality through which His voice should be heard, and that He would first attest this instrumentality by signs of divine intervention, and, secondly, carefully guard it from error in the discharge of its office. He could not be expected always to prevent misconception on the part of the hearer or learner, but He would be bound to keep substantial error from the mouth of the teacher. Otherwise there would be no enunciation of truth, and the consequences of such a futile attempt at enlightening man would be worse than no revelation at all.

Again, the truths manifested, to be the objects of faith, should be clearly stated, without any hesitation or uncertainty. Unless they were clearly stated, the mind could not receive them, for they would not be intelligible; and if there were the slightest uncer-

tainty, there would be a contradiction impossible to the reason. There can be no uncertainty about God's knowledge, and there can be no medium between certainty and uncertainty. The truth in question would either be revealed clearly or not at all. God could not make known certain facts concerning His being and His relations to us, and then leave us free to believe them or not. For the ground of belief is the same in all cases—the veracity of God; and he who receives one truth on such a motive must likewise receive all which are proposed in the same manner. Reason rejects contradictions, though passion and prejudice may entertain them. By the condition of a clear statement of the matter revealed, no one will misunderstand us as excluding the proposition of mysteries, which are a necessity in the communications between the finite and the infinite mind. We

only repeat what has been before stated, that, even in the revelation of things above our capacity to fathom, the mystery offered to faith must be clearly stated and in unequivocal terms.

II.

The possibility of such a revelation is easily established. It cannot be denied without denying the omnipotence of God or the intelligence of man. Surely the power of God cannot be limited. He can manifest truth to His creatures if He is pleased so to do.

We, finite as we are, can teach others and impart to them of our knowledge. Cannot the infinite mind do the same? Is He less perfect than His creatures? Secondly, if man have the power of knowing, which no one can logically deny without affirming it, then there is no difficulty on his part. He can

receive truth, know it as far as it is intelligible, and turn it to good account. Lastly, there can be found no difficulty on the part of the truth revealed, for this is the genuine object of knowledge. Our finite powers may not enable us to comprehend all the verities God may propose to us, but they are all intelligible, and, in this respect, open to our perceptions. Mysteries announce to us always a clear and intelligible truth which is the object of faith. The intimate relations, the full proportions of truths mysterious are hidden from us, and not that sense which is obvious, and which the mind readily seizes. We have already explained this distinction. We define man to be an animal formed of a body and a rational soul. Who understands this relation of spirit and matter, or can comprehend whence arises this union of body and soul? Yet who does not understand

what man is? Who is incapable of appreciating the definition? The same rule applies to all the mysteries of religion. They are not occult and manifest under the same respect, but perfectly clear in statement, and only occult from the very nature of the truths themselves as proposed to a finite intelligence. Neither is there any repugnance to reason in the truths proposed by religion, and, if it be admitted that they are not in all respects conformed to reason, what else could be expected of things which surpass the natural order, and relate to matters superhuman or divine? No one can, therefore, deny the possibility of a revelation without, at the same time, assailing the plainest testimony of nature in regard to God and man.

III.

But we are able to advance beyond this position, and to show that the needs of our race called loudly for the divine intervention, and rendered the mercy of a revelation not only probable, but even morally necessary. We argue this from the condition of man under the light of nature and the infinite goodness of our Creator. Here, calling to mind what has been said, we repeat the language of St. Paul, and find the nations inexcusable who, when they might have known the eternal power and divinity of God from the creation, darkened their foolish hearts, and from gross idolatry fell into shameful vice. Even the primeval traditions were forgotten, or corrupted by the notions of a false religion. All the best instincts of nature were transgressed, and the plain teachings of

reason contradicted. And the philosophers, who were too wise to accept the low superstitions of the common people, were unable to form a fixed belief, while, by their constant disputations and discordant doctrines, they lost the confidence of the multitude. Such was the history of nations unenlightened by the beams of a special revelation. Idolatry became the fruitful parent of crimes against the natural law, and the first principles of ethics were lost sight of in the forgetfulness of duty toward God and toward man. Even natural affection ceased to enforce its rights, and injustice, impurity, and murder were sanctioned by common superstition. There is no necessity of adducing, at any length, the records of heathen tribes, nor of referring to the well-known facts of nations now sunk in the darkness of paganism.

From this great need of man we perceive

that he will not obtain his end without some new light from his Maker. We do not argue that he cannot rise above the vices and errors which surround him, still less that God is absolutely bound to interpose. But we reason that, on the part of the fallen creature wandering so far from the path that leads to beatitude, there is a fearful need that some almighty arm should come to his rescue. We see that he will not rise unless the divine hand be put forth to raise him up, and assist the enfeebled powers of nature; and from the infinite mercy of our Creator, and His love for the works of His hand, we argue that He will come to man's necessity, and not allow him to wander for ever from the pasture of the Great Shepherd, nor go down in utter darkness to the shadows of death. We could not tell how, nor when, nor where He would interpose; but the race of Adam

would wait for the Lord and cry mightily unto its Maker, "Send help from Thy holy place and light from Sion." "They shall look to the earth, and behold trouble and darkness, weakness and distress, and a mist following them, and they cannot fly away from their distress. . . . The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light has risen."*

IV.

Upon the supposition, however, that God proposes to make a revelation to man, it is certain that He will attest His intervention by plain and unanswerable proofs. These we have a right to demand from Him, for we are not called upon to believe in any thing

* Isaiah viii. 22; ix. 2.

supernatural without sufficient evidence ; and if such proofs were not given, there would be no sure way to fortify ourselves against the possibility of deceit. Almighty God is able to give such proofs, and in justice to His creatures He is bound so to do if He proposes to interpose for their good. These proofs must, then, be of a nature to carry conviction to every sincere and candid mind. There can be no evidence to which men will be forced to yield if they deliberately refuse to see the light or to use their reason. Yet here the fault is on the part of the frailty and perverseness of man, and not on the part of God. Evidence internal addressed to individual minds would not be sufficient to establish a revelation. There must be plain external proof that God is speaking to us mediately or immediately, and that we are exposed to no deception of man.

Such proofs before a revelation are miracles and prophecy, while after its establishment the manner of its preservation and the influence of its doctrine may come before us to add strength to the evidence already given. Each one of these sources of testimony demands a separate consideration.

1. Miracles, being works above and sometimes contrary to the order of created nature, furnish the most evident proof. Thus to a genuine miracle is required some sensible effect, contrary to the accustomed order of providence, which can therefore be produced by God alone, who is the author of nature. The sensible effect is manifest to the eyes of the beholders, who have every opportunity to judge of what they see and to guard against deception. And the nature of the work wrought before competent witnesses is so plainly contrary to the ac-

customed order of things that the divine power is evidently in exercise. There are things striking and wonderful which can be performed by angelic or diabolical agency, but a genuine miracle transcends this, and requires the Almighty hand. For example, the sudden and complete cure of the sick, the raising of the dead to life, are operations which no one but God can work, since they imply the power of life and death. And in cases where our own eyes do not behold such miracles, we must have the testimony of numerous and competent eye-witnesses, whose word is as good as the evidence of our own senses. We cannot distrust the senses of others if we rely upon our own; and where there are witnesses so numerous that collusion is impossible, we are forced to yield assent or reject the first principles of reason. In the actual affairs of human life the greater

part of our knowledge is derived from such testimony, and he who would reject it would be esteemed a fool by all mankind.

The possibility of such miracles is quite clear, since there is no intrinsic contradiction involved in them, and therefore God can, if He will, produce them, and, where there is a sufficient reason, will do so.

The physical laws of nature depend upon the free will of God, and are not like the moral laws, which have for their object good and evil which change not. Neither are these physical laws subverted, but only suspended or deviated from in particular cases, where there is great good to be accomplished, such as will glorify the Author of Mercy and conduce to the highest benefit of His creatures. Where, then, can any impossibility of miracles be deduced? Not from the part of God, who must of necessity be omni-

potent; and certainly not on the part of the sensible effect, which involves no contradiction nor repugnance in reason.

Here, then, we have the clearest evidence of divine intervention; and if such miracles are wrought to attest a supernatural revelation, we have an invincible motive of faith. No one but God can be the author of such miracles, and He cannot lend His power to deceive us, nor allow us to be deceived by any agency proceeding from Him. Whenever, then, we are sure of a true miracle, we are also certain of his divine mission by whom the miracle is wrought. There can be no escape from this conclusion. Convinced of the truth, we must yield obedience to the voice of reason and conscience. There have been and there may still be false miracles which have every appearance, at first sight, of true supernatural works. But such facts

are rare, and on examination easily afford evidence of their falsity. They only strengthen our argument, because they make more evident the character of true and divine miracles. Now, there can be no question that, if we see a miracle with our own eyes, we must believe it. He who would deny the evidence of his own senses under all the favorable circumstances which ordinarily produce conviction could not be reasoned with at all. But it could not be required of God, if He were to make a revelation, that He should work miracles before every eye, and make every individual man the witness of such wonders. All that could be expected would be that the first teachers of the truths revealed should be attested by the signs of divine power in the face of competent testimony. Such testimony would be that of persons intelligent enough to judge of the effect pro-

duced before their eyes, and indisposed to be deceived or to deceive others. On the introduction of a new religion such witnesses could easily be found, when the minds of men would necessarily be disposed to examine well every strange truth proposed, and on the alert against deception. The testimony of such witnesses would attest once and for ever the divinity of a revelation. For God cannot lie, and therefore can never propose at one time truths which could be contradicted afterward by any teacher sent from Him. A revelation once proved remains for ever, so far as the truths revealed are concerned. They stand fast and as immovable as God Himself.

In these few and simple words we think we have anticipated the objections which the adversaries of faith are apt to offer. No objection can be successfully urged while every

one implies either a contradiction in terms or a denial of the attributes of God. It has been said, however, that no sufficient evidence of a miracle can ever be given, because the argument in favor of the inflexibility of the laws of nature is greater than any testimony which can possibly be given of their suspension. Where is the argument which proves that the laws of nature cannot be suspended? We have never heard such an argument sustained. If the Almighty cannot deviate in particular cases from laws established by His own free will, He ceases to be almighty. And as for the evidence required, it simply comes to this: that a certain amount of evidence produces conviction on every reasonable mind, and that there is no escape but in scepticism, which throws doubt upon every kind of testimony. It is all very well to resort to this scepticism as a captious ob-

jection to a revealed truth, but it violates reason and every just notion of God or man. The Divine Wisdom did not so make us that we should distrust the senses He gave us and the intelligence by which we differ from the brute creation. I am as capable of judging of a miracle as of any other sensible operation. I can judge of death, and, therefore, of a resurrection from the dead. Sickness of every class, in its external manifestations, is within my knowledge, and, therefore, an instantaneous recovery from disease to health is a matter of which my senses can take full cognizance. To tell me that what I see is a deception, is to shake my faith in all that I can see and know. If God can deceive me at one time, He is likely to do so at another, and, therefore, becomes unworthy of my confidence. And when I lose my trust in the veracity and goodness of God, I am

utterly without faith. Against such practical atheism reason revolts in its strongest accents, and demonstrates how her would-be votaries have dethroned their goddess, and trailed her glories in the dust.

2. Another proof of the authenticity of a revelation may be found in prophecy, or the distinct foretelling of future events which can be known to creatures by no natural means. It is self-evident that all future events are known to God, to whom there are no gradations of time, no past nor future; and hence it is in His power to make known to the creature whatever He shall choose. No argument is here requisite, and hence the conclusion follows that he who is able clearly to predict future events is sustained by divine power, and is a messenger from God in the truths which he teaches. The enunciations of the prophet, and the fact of their

literal fulfilment, are closely to be examined, and every point is rigidly to be scrutinized. No indistinct utterances, no oracular sayings, capable of diverse interpretations, are prophecies. Thus, false prophets are to be detected from the nature of their predictions and the ambiguous words in which they are conceived. When, in the history of the Hebrews, Moses stood before the king of Egypt, and day after day foretold the plagues and judgments about to come upon him and his nation, there was the plainest evidence of divine interposition. Moses could have not wrought any of the plagues of which he spoke, since they implied divine power; neither could he have known of them, except by the inspiration of God. Again, when our Lord Jesus Christ painted the fearful scenes which were to occur after His death in the destruction of Jerusalem, the

exact fulfilment of all His prophecy was an unanswerable proof of the divinity which He claimed. And though we know not the extent of angelical or diabolical knowledge, we are quite certain that both angels and devils are subject to Almighty power, and will never be allowed to deceive us in the truth or falsehood of a revelation. A teacher whom God sends to be the medium by which He communicates truths supernatural to mankind must show the credentials of his mission. If he can work miracles, or rightly foretell future events, then there is no room for doubting his authority. There have been many false prophets, who have spoken in vague and equivocal language; but they are easily distinguished by the failure of their predictions, which were only attempts to impose upon the ignorant and credulous, and to make a gain of their superstitions. The

prophets of the true God have announced certain and determined events, remote in place or time, with all their circumstances, even the most minute; while the event has verified their words and redounded to the glory of Him who inspired them.

3. A religion coming from God, and communicated to man in a supernatural manner, will necessarily need for its preservation the divine care, and so the continuity of its life and the manner of its propagation will speak the nature of its origin. This is eminently true of a system of doctrines which combats the natural passions of men, and calls them from indulgence to self-denial and virtue. Every false religion has compromised with the animal demands of our nature, and to a greater or lesser degree has sanctioned vice. Teachers who inveigh against immorality and openly rebuke sin excite at

once the opposition of the world and the bitter enmity of the sensual. The life and triumphs of such a religion are proofs of more than human vitality, and are an evidence that the Almighty power which interposed by signs and wonders to authenticate its mission to man has never deserted its onward march in the regeneration of the world. This testimony becomes doubly strong when no human means are employed to sustain it, when its apostles are not warriors enforcing with fire and steel the acceptance of its doctrines, when no kingdom sends forth its armies in its behalf, when still more the powers of earth are arrayed against it, and the strong and mighty rise up on every side to destroy it and blot its name from history. Where there are no material weapons; where, on the contrary, there is a constant struggle with human strength, and still, in

spite of all, there is a triumphant life and fertility which persecution does not quench, there is the presence of the power which rules in the armies of heaven, and does according to His will among the inhabitants of earth.

No human pride can counterfeit the divine life, no earthly organization the vitality which defies decay. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. . . . Thou in the beginning didst form the earth, and the works of Thy hands are the heavens. They shall perish, but Thou shalt continue; they all shall grow old like a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the self-same, and Thy years shall not fail."* Time, as he passes in his work of destruction and brings to decay all human things, adds to the strength

* E. Hebrews, i. 8-12.

of this testimony in favor of a religion which partakes of the unchangeableness of the Divine Being.

4. Mankind have also a right to judge of the moral influence of the truths revealed, and in their enlightening and sanctifying influence to receive a new evidence of their divinity. There are deep wants in our souls, and we must look to God alone to fill them. There is the high sense of right and wrong, the appreciation of truth and beauty, the insatiable desire to know, the longing to rise above passion and sense, and to see more perfectly the providence which encompasses us. Hence, we are the judges of the effects of a religion which thus we test, as the tree is known by its fruit. The Great Artificer knoweth well the work of His hands, and the light which comes from Him answers the end of our

being. Shadows flee away from the domain of the intellect and the heart, all things take their proper place, truth presents its attractions without fear, and beauty high and holy captivates the affections without ensnaring the reason. Hence, passion no longer sways the understanding, and man rises from the level of the brute to the purity and nobility of his nature, which once came from God crowned with glory and honor. We have a right to demand that every teaching of God should lead to holiness, and produce its happy effects on the soul yielding to its influence. No immorality is from above. No creed which debases man or lends sanction to vice bears the mark of a heavenly origin. But where we are able to see mighty conquests over self, advance in real progress, self-denial carried to a heroic degree, we behold the emancipation of man from

the slavery of sin; we behold him ascending toward the divine sanctity, whose only purpose in revelation must be such a regeneration and exaltation of our race. Let, then, the religion which professes to be from God be tried impartially by such a test. Let its influence upon the world, upon society, upon the individual man, be carefully examined, and let the voice of history come to add its testimony to the many proofs of divine revelation. This is a test which the word of God itself suggests. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.”*

v.

Before closing this lecture, we have to speak briefly of the most important of all questions, and to bring yet more into light the manner in which a revelation shall be introduced into the world and maintained consistently with its necessary conditions. Here we shall endeavor to reason with the utmost candor, and in such a simple manner as to carry conviction to every mind. We take it for granted that, on the supposition of a revelation, the truths made known to mankind in so extraordinary a way are of the highest importance to our whole race. We require, then, that on the most indubitable signs of divine intervention they be

* St. Matthew vii. 15-20.

taught us plainly, so that the sincere mind need not err, and that a method be devised for extending the knowledge of these truths and maintaining them intact, in order that the successive generations of men may embrace them with the same assurance as that which crowned the confession of the first believers.

In regard to the introduction of a revelation, we can see no method, except that which has in fact been adopted, of enlightening the minds of one or more among men with the clear perception of the truths to be communicated. In this method are implied two things—the imparting knowledge to the individuals who are employed as the mediums through whom God speaks, and, secondly, the enabling them to express clearly the doctrines made known to their minds. They must have correct notions of the

truths they declare by divine impulse, and be so guided in teaching them that there is no corruption of the sacred trust committed to them. Supernatural light is not communicated to them for their own benefit, but for the whole race to which they are sent as messengers. As we have already seen, their mission requires authentication to themselves and to mankind. Hence, by well-substantiated miracles, or by prophecies, they must vindicate their authority as teachers from God. No one is required to believe without sufficient reason, and no mere man has any right to dictate to another. When the first teachers of a revelation have thus, by signs and wonders which divine power alone can work, proved the supernatural character of their doctrines, there is evidence sufficient to convince all to whom their words may be addressed.

But, inasmuch as the knowledge of truth is for the good of all men, how shall the revelation of God, successfully introduced into the world, be preserved, and be extended throughout the earth, and safely delivered to the various generations of mankind? We can conceive of no other way than that of a succession of teachers who shall receive the sacred trust intact and be able to impart it to others. To preserve this continuity of life the divine power is certainly necessary, but this is presupposed, and affords no difficulty to the reason. The Supreme Being, who planned in mercy a revelation, is bound to preserve the work of His own hands. Neither is it required that miracles or prophecies shall accompany continually the line of teachers who derive their authority from the original messengers of God. It will be sufficient that these first founders

of a religion shall provide for coming ages by a divine impulse, that they shall fortify their successors with the promise of supernatural guidance in the office they are called to discharge. That promise will rest on the veracity of God, pledged to them by the unmistakable signs which authenticate their revelation. Until this authority shall be withdrawn by the same mighty power, it will stand on the unchangeable nature of Him who is truth itself. Wonders may be wrought at will, but the first miracles stand as sure in their testimony as when they were seen by the multitudes that gazed in awe upon them, or listened in rapt admiration at the voice of the prophet.

The proofs of which we have spoken as substantiating a revelation after its first establishment will ever be present. The true religion will live in a superhuman manner,

and in spite of opposition from all the might of this world. Time, as it crumbles the monuments of fame to dust, will leave it untouched. Age shall only strengthen its power, and from every conflict it shall come forth with the freshness of enduring youth. The line of its divinely-guided teachers shall never fail, though the enmity of its adversaries be armed with fire and sword. One failure would be the destruction of all; for the line once lost, could only be recovered by a new revelation. And men should be the impartial judges as to the influence of the doctrines so miraculously taught and wonderfully preserved. They should tell us if high morality and the elevation of man to every noble virtue are the consequences of religion, if society owes to it its progress in civilization and honor, if the departure from its principles leads to vice and the darkness of

pagan degradation. On such points the decision of mankind could not long be in error. Here, then, we perceive a safe and reasonable way by which, in perfect consistency with every attribute of God or man, a revelation may be preserved in its purity and taught in its power. And we can perceive no other way. Traditions are likely to become corrupt unless they are guarded by divine care, and it is almost an axiom that the learner must be taught, and in a clear and infallible manner. Much has been said in late years in regard to infallibility, as if in it there were any difficulties for the reason. But every sincere person will see that, if there is to be such a thing as the teaching of supernatural truth, that teaching must be infallible, otherwise it is no truth, but falsehood. Between truth and error there is no medium. If a doctrine be not true, it is false. Partial truth,

if we may even use the term, is the most deceptive and dangerous form of error.

And as for the method of teaching by means of writing, it is impracticable and impossible according to the ordinary modes of mental discipline. Let us suppose that the original founders of a religion wrote down in a book, or collection of books, the truths they were inspired to make known. The line of living teachers of which we have spoken would be required to prove the authenticity of their writings, and to apply them. Man without this assistance would be easily deceived, and could have no divine safeguard against error. And then, in the understanding of the written revelation, the individual mind, unaided by any external authority, would certainly fall into misapprehension and misinterpretation. No man could be sure of his creed, or pretend to impose obligations of belief upon

another, and hence all faith would fail. God Himself could not teach men by means of a book unless He were in each individual case to supply infallibility of the understanding. For this the same evidence would be required as that which first authenticated a religion. Moreover, very few of men could ever see the divine writings, or read them if they could see them, so that the largest part of the world would be at the mercy of the educated minority. The scenes of Babel would return, and if ever there were one language, the tongues of men would speedily be confused.

In the statements and arguments now advanced, we believe that no one can accuse us of partiality. If the facts and miracles of religion have given us the light by which our path has been illumined, it is certainly

no proof that we have not followed the honest dictates of reason. We could not argue as if we were living in the natural order, and as if the sun of God's mercy were not shining over our heads. But we have violated no principle of our nature when, on the great question of revelation, we have sought to bring into exercise the faculties by which it is given us to apprehend the author and end of our being. The simple argument we have made is wholly in accordance with our reason, and must be admitted, or all of truth must be lost in infidelity. And how does it add to our worship of the All-wise Creator that thus in living characters He has written His message to our souls, and, condescending to the work of our redemption, has left in every path of His mercy the beams of His glory, the evidence of His greatness! All His works praise Him, but,

above all, the intellect of man, formed to know, admire, and embrace His perfections. "We shall say much, and yet shall want words: but the sum of our words is, He is all. What shall we be able to do to glorify Him? for the Almighty Himself is above all His works. Who shall see Him and declare Him, and who shall magnify Him as He is from the beginning? There are many things hidden from us that are greater than these; for we have seen but few of His works. But the Lord hath made all things, and to the godly He hath given wisdom." *

* Ecclesiasticus xliii. 29-37



LECTURE IV.



REVELATION AND PROTESTANTISM.

IN our preceding lectures we have endeavored to lay down the principles which we are now to apply to the great question of the day. We feel well assured that no one can reasonably dispute the conclusions we have drawn from the most obvious truths. Reason, well understood, has no conflict with faith, but is, on the contrary, its handmaiden. All depends upon the fact, to be well established, that God has made a revelation to man, and that He has authenticated that revelation by suffi-

cient testimony. We have considered the evidence which reason has a right to ask, and with which it ought to be satisfied. When that evidence is afforded us, every dictate of our enlightened nature will call us to hear, believe, and obey the voice of God. Here the understanding may rest without fear. If God be not true, there is no such thing as truth.

Yet objects to us the inquirer, that there are many claimants to the authority of revelation, that there is discordance among those who believe in truths supernatural, and that, consequently, it is not easy to know where the voice of God is to be heard. We must, therefore, apply the principles we have established, and try the claimants by the tests of reason, which we have seen to be accurate and sufficient. Any system that will not stand these tests can have no rightful title

to the obedience of men. Moreover, there can be no discord in a true revelation, where, of necessity, every part must be consistent. There is only one God, and there can be only one religion which has His sanction.

Looking around us at the position of those who believe in any divine intervention for the good of our race, we find certainly, sects and organizations whose name is "legion;" but they may be fairly ranked in two classes, under the denominations of Protestants and Catholics. It is our purpose briefly to examine, this evening, the relation which the former bear to a well-attested revelation, leaving the claims of the Catholic Church for the discussion of our closing lecture. It will be our duty to define Protestantism, to see how far it can be called a teacher, to ask for the proofs of its divine mission, and in its history to determine if it has any thing more than human vitality.

I.

Protestantism is a negative term, implying more the denial of doctrines than the assertion of them. In fact, Protestants are those who protest against the creed of the Catholic Church, either in a body or as individuals. The general term has a very wide application, and embraces all who *protest*, whatever may be their difference of opinion or mutual animosity. There is almost every conceivable shade of belief on every point of doctrine. Some approach the dogmas and discipline of the Catholic Church, while others are as far as possible removed from every appearance of ecclesiastical organization. Some receive the mystery of the Trinity and accept the system of sacramental grace, while others are found who deny nearly every thing but the existence of God. There are various

bodies or churches holding different ideas, and there are those who belong to no organization whatever, who must be included in the denomination of Protestants. They call themselves Christians because the greater number accept our Lord Jesus Christ as the founder of their religion, although some receive Him only as a messenger directly or indirectly from God, and not as a divine person.

The origin of these representatives of revelation is very singular. The movement of the sixteenth century, generally called the Reformation, gave birth to their system; and while the first use of the term *Protestant* may be traced to the assembly held in Spire in 1529, it became shortly after the appellation of all who, seceding from the Roman Catholic Church, denied the right of that church to teach, and inveighed against any of its doc-

trines. Up to that time all believers in Christianity had accepted the authority of the church as the authorized teacher of the faith revealed to the world by our Saviour Jesus Christ. Protestants revolted against this long-received and undisputed claim, asserting that the truths of Christianity were contained in the Bible, and that every individual mind was able there to find them out, there to read his creed, there to discover the full proportions of his articles of belief. The various doctrines held for ages as integral parts of the Christian faith were to be examined, and approved or rejected by the individual reason.

At first there was no ecclesiastical organization, and the upholders of the Reformation were held together by only a common bond of sympathy. But as time went on, and the necessity of some greater external unity was felt, churches were formed bear-

ing different titles and adopting different creeds. From these have originated all the various religious bodies which cover our land. Some retained many of the forms and much of the polity of the ancient church, while others, stigmatizing the Papacy as the Harlot of Babylon spoken of in the Apocalypse, eschewed every thing which bore in any way "the mark of the beast." Greater diversity could not be conceived of, and the progress of time has only increased the discord. One church has given birth to many others, who in turn, with an unparalleled fecundity, count a more numerous progeny. Every year beholds new accessions and new divisions, and so the face of Protestantism is ever changing. Yet all agree in rejecting the Holy Roman Church, and, therefore, by this one negative characteristic are bound in sympathy. If this system be the true

representative of revelation, then certainly the Catholic system is not, since there is a direct contradiction between them. If any number of Protestants accept portions of the old creed, we are to understand that they do so on the authority of private judgment, and not because of any ecclesiastical influence.

There is, therefore, a direct opposition which can never be removed between Protestant and Catholic Christianity; and if one is right the other is wrong, and there is no middle ground on which the intellect may rest. These two systems dispute the right to teach the truths of revelation, and between them there never can be harmony. Let us, in the name of God, be open to the convictions of reason, and apply without fear the tests of our former lectures.

Before proceeding to our next point, how-

ever, we briefly note that there are perhaps those who would like to hold a middle ground, and be at the same time neither Catholics nor Protestants. We ask any honest mind if such a position is a possibility. We may call ourselves by any name we choose; the question is not what we are called, but what we are. And on the definition we have made, all those organizations are embraced under the general term of Protestantism who owe their origin to the Reformation, and agree in protesting against the Church of Rome. The quantity of protest is not material, since the right to deny one doctrine of what professes to be revealed religion implies the right to deny all. The truths of revelation must be accepted as they stand in a body, or they cannot reasonably be accepted at all.

II.

From what we have now seen, it will not be difficult to decide the claims of Protestantism as a teacher. We shall observe that it teaches nothing clearly, pretends to no authority, and is able to present us with none.

1. We cannot view the various sects individually, since time would not allow us to do so, but the general remarks we are to make will apply to them all. Taken together they teach nothing; for, on comparing one with another, we find that the doctrines asserted by one are rejected by another. Perhaps beyond the truths taught us by nature there is no agreement whatever, and even these truths are sometimes attacked in whole or in part. As to dogmas said to be revealed, there can hardly be found

one on which there is perfect accord. The divinity of the founder of Christianity has been denied, and certainly one would argue that this is an essential condition of the whole scheme of revelation through Him. No one could make up a creed out of the confessions of the many sects; and if such a thing were possible, it could not be held with any consistency, since where many teachers really teach contradictions, there is nothing taught.

If we separate the various divisions of Protestantism, and seek to follow any one of them, we meet with new difficulty. Nothing is taught distinctly, and truths admitted are not followed to their just conclusions. The confession has many interpretations even within the same spiritual communion, and there is no one to decide which is right or which is wrong. The resurrection of the

body, for example, will be professed in the written formulary, and many who hold to the formulary will deny that this refers to the body of flesh which we have now, and explain it by the creation of a new and spiritual body. We know a large and wide-spread communion which differs on the question of man's fall by original sin, and consequently on his need of a redemption. We know another where there is a diametrical opposition on the question of the utility of forms in religion, on the necessity of baptism, and on the existence of any visible signs of inward grace. We know religious bodies where the members and ministers, opposing each other, are as much estranged as if they belonged to different communions.

Here, then, Protestantism is no teacher, since it proposes no positive truth; and if it be concordant in the negation of certain

articles of belief, this is not teaching. I need no man and no authority to tell me what is not true ; I ask for truth, which is the positive want of my soul, and this I need in clear and unmistakable terms.

2. No one can teach without authority clearly shown. He who proposes a doctrine with hesitancy or uncertainty does not propose it as an article of faith, but merely as a possible opinion. There is only one authority which can teach any supernatural truth, and that is God's. He only can know it, and He only can impart it. When such authority is not shown, I cannot be asked to believe. No man and no body of men has any right to dictate my faith. Now, is there one Protestant church which pretends to teach on the authority of God, and therefore to be an infallible witness of what has been divinely revealed? If there is, we do not know it, and

have never even heard of it. If there is no individual sect which has this authority, then certainly all taken together do not possess it; and where it is not known in the individuals, it is not known in the collection of individuals. Surely, then, according to the plainest demonstrations of reason, Protestants cannot exercise that faith which we have defined, and which rests solely on the divine veracity. We take them at their own word, and give them just that authority which they claim, and nothing more. They do not claim any divine authority, and why, therefore, should they be thought to possess it?

3. It has been said, however, that, although Protestantism has no divine authority, and pretends to none, yet the revelation of God is contained in the Holy Scriptures, which are the common property of all faithful men, and that the truths of God's revelation are plainly

announced in them. We answer, then, in the clearest argument, which it seems to us no honest mind can resist: Firstly, the whole authority of Protestantism is waived by this assertion, unless the power to interpret the Scriptures infallibly be possessed by one or all of the many sects. Such power is claimed nowhere, and therefore, according to the obvious sense of mankind, Protestantism becomes an abstraction, and has no longer a concrete existence. It represents an idea, and is not a body of living men.

Secondly. If the Bible, interpreted by the individual, and therefore fallible mind, be the authority on which alone divine truth rests, then there are important questions to be answered, and by each individual, before he commences the work of finding out what he should believe, a work which he has no right to intrust to another. He must

determine, without the fear of error, what the Bible is, and of what parts it consists. He must prove by an infallible, that is, by a divine authority that this Bible, in its various parts, is the inspired word of God. His own opinion will not be sufficient. He must have the proofs of a revelation which we have spoken of in our last lecture. If these are not afforded, he can neither convince himself nor others. He cannot trust to any translation of the Scriptures, but must recur to the original text, to which alone the character of inspiration is affixed. When these points are settled, has he found a teacher? Is the truth contained in the sacred books so plainly expressed, that, to use a phrase peculiarly Protestant, "The ignorant and wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein"? Let history reply, against whose facts there is no argument,

From that which has been, we may safely conclude that which shall be. Men have not found the Scriptures so clear as to cause them to agree on any one article of belief. And the truth is, that no book whatever can be so written that the individual mind may not differently interpret it. And when you add the power of prejudice, and the influence of passion, there is no further need of disputation. "This is my body," is made to mean, this is a figure of my body. "Whose sins you shall remit they are remitted," is applied only to external ecclesiastical discipline, as "I and my Father are one" is explained of unity of sentiment. We repeat that God Himself cannot teach by a book, unless in every individual instance He send special light to guard against error.

And passing over all other arguments, if the Bible be the only divine way of teach-

ing truth, has not God signally failed? Where is His revelation?

The greater part of mankind have had no way of knowing what the Scriptures contain except through the medium of others. The art of printing was not discovered before the fifteenth century, and until that time the sacred manuscripts were accessible to but few. Were the Scriptures privately interpreted the rule of faith before that time? And even since that date and the more general diffusion of knowledge, are the majority of men able to read, and thus see with their own eyes? That cannot be the Christian religion which only commenced four hundred years ago, nor have the Scriptures ever been to the individual reason in place of a teacher.

4. The remarks we have made upon the subject of private judgment apply to the

whole system of Protestantism, since, according to the principles which lie at its very foundation, every doctrine is referred to this ordeal. On the private interpretation of the Bible the original Reformers justified their secession from the ancient and received Christianity, and on the use of this same right the constant changes which history has recorded have taken place in their organization and articles of belief. We have only then to repeat our argument, and conclude that, where every individual mind is the judge of the intrinsic credibility of a doctrine, there is no authoritative teaching, no faith, no appearance of the necessary conditions of a revelation. How, then, for one moment, can the reason accept a theory so irrational, which confuses the most evident principles of philosophy, and subverts the very idea of truth supernatural? And how unwise

for those who transgress the primary laws of the human mind, to appeal to that reason which everywhere they disobey and trample under foot?

III.

Finding that Protestantism can teach us nothing, we might conclude that it can in no way be the representative of a divine revelation. But let us continue our application of the tests of reason, and ask for the proofs of its mission from God. The evidence which established Christianity will not apply to the religious system we are examining, because it is essentially modern and in all its features an innovation upon that which had been known as the doctrine of Christ.

We need new evidence which will directly apply to Protestantism itself. It began

by attacking the church which for fourteen centuries had been the only teacher of truth supernatural, and its chief characteristic is still to war against the same church. The fact of secession proves a contradiction and the inauguration of a new system. If it retained certain of the dogmas of the old faith, it did so professedly by the exercise of private judgment. It could not have kept them on the authority of the church so violently renounced. And whatever evidence these dogmas may have, they do not derive it from the movement of the Reformers. If it be said that Christianity became corrupt, that the Catholic Church did not keep the doctrine revealed, or overwhelmed it by inventions and superstitious practices, then, according to such a supposition, the revelation made through our Lord Jesus Christ had failed, and it was necessary for

God to introduce a new one, or to revive the old one by the usual proofs of a divine interposition. There is much greater opposition between Protestantism and Catholicity, than there was between Judaism and Christianity. The old law was a figure of the new, and was fulfilled in it. "I came," said our Lord, "not to destroy, but to fulfil;" while the reform cuts down the church, root and branch, and inveighs against her doctrine and worship, and above all, her authority. The Jew might have become a Christian without renouncing any essential of his creed. The Catholic cannot become a Protestant without utterly renouncing his former belief, and adopting new modes of worship, new grounds of faith. Yet we ask and receive for the revelation of Christ the unmistakable proofs of divine mission, and therefore much more must we do so on the

introduction of Protestantism. We, then, according to reason, demand of the Reformers or founders of their system the testimony of heaven that they are sent of God to teach a new revelation, or revive an old one lost in corruption.

1. Miracles are not pretended, and so far as we have heard, were not wrought through the agency of any of these new teachers. They appealed to the word of God, and from it argued the tenets they were pleased to hold. They applied prophecy, some in one way, some in another, but no one of them claimed a mission from on high to be attested by miracles. They demanded the right to treat at will the received Christianity, but professed to show no proof of special inspiration. They even went so far as to assail the miracles of the Catholic Church as impositions upon the credulous, and part and parcel

of the dark superstition which had bound the minds of men so many years. They admitted generally no miracles save those recorded in Scripture, and consequently could appeal to none as the evidence of their mission. Martin Luther professed that he had an extraordinary vocation from God, and yet gave as the proof of it only the remarkable success of his preaching, which he considered miraculous. We shall shortly have occasion to speak of this success. But he did not argue so with Muncer, the Anabaptist, who assumed the title and function of a pastor. He would not allow him to prove his doctrine from the Scriptures, but ordered that he should be asked, "Who had given him commission to teach? Should he answer, God, then let him prove it by a manifest miracle; for when God intends to alter any thing in the ordinary form of mission, it is by such

signs that He declares Himself.”* Why did not this remarkable man apply to his own case the argument he used against others? Here, then, Protestantism comes into the world singularly unblest. It undertakes to overthrow a great and universally extended religion, and brings no miracle whatever to prove that God is its author. How can it ask the consent of the reason when it presents no motive of credibility?

2. The same want of credentials appears when we ask if any of their leaders were gifted with prophecy. Unfortunately for them, the few predictions they ventured upon failed, and they confined themselves generally to interpretations of the Apocalypse, none of which have been verified. Luther foretold more than once the downfall of the Papacy. “The papal reign was to

* Sleidan, l. v.

expire on a sudden by the breath of Jesus Christ; namely, by the preaching of Luther. Daniel was express on this point. St. Paul left no doubt. The space of two years was the longest reprieve he could allow."* Many of his followers have continued the same strain of prophecy, and yet the Papacy still lives with as much apparent vitality as ever. We are not aware of any other attempts at prediction of the future. The curious explanations of the mysterious utterances of the Apocalypse can hardly be considered in the light of genuine prophecies. They have not yet been fulfilled in the sense in which they were interpreted, and, as days go by, the likelihood of such fulfilment becomes less and less. We need not, therefore, dwell any longer upon this point. Whatever the Reformers might have been, God gave them

* Bossuet's *Variations*, i. 40.

no knowledge of future events to vindicate their extraordinary mission.

3. Martin Luther appealed to the success of his preaching, as a miraculous sign of divine favor. We have already seen that success alone is not a note of the true religion. Many false religions have succeeded, and that to a most wonderful degree. Witness, for example, the religion of Mohammed, which spread with the most remarkable celerity, and still lives in the observance of a large part of mankind. Success, to be a note of revelation, depends upon three conditions: First, That the doctrines taught do not flatter the senses or excite the animal passions; secondly, That the instrumentality of the moral power of these doctrines is alone employed, and that no arm of human force is used; and, thirdly, That the success be a veritable one, not simply the destruction of a

certain religious belief, but the permanent establishment of a new one. Let us apply these three conditions and see how far Luther's claim holds good. First, The doctrines of the Reformers did flatter the animal side of man, so far as this, that they proclaimed the specious notion of liberty to the reason, and freedom from all the restraints which the old religion had imposed. The whole system of penance was struck at its root; good works were no longer necessities in the scheme of salvation, and every pretence of ecclesiastical authority ceased. Each man was set free to follow the promptings of his own private judgment. The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the celibacy of the clergy, the utility of austerities were all assailed. Now, we do not here discuss the merits of any of these things. Our single point is, that the removal of these received

notions of God's service opened the way to the gratification of passion. The time when Luther commenced his work was also very favorable to the success of his movement. There were abuses in discipline which the church was laboring to correct, men were becoming impatient of all restraint, and rationalism was ready to strike a decisive blow. So when the opening was made, the torrent flowed on with fury, bursting all bounds. The first Reformers were themselves astonished at the result of their own movement, and made vain efforts to restrain the excesses of their followers. There is nothing wonderful in the sight of men following the instincts of appetite, and rushing in the direction of license. When, then, we see reasons enough in the frailty of man for the success of the Reformation, we cannot ascribe to the hand of

God alone the rapidity with which Luther's doctrines spread throughout Europe.

Secondly, It was not owing to the moral force of Luther's propositions that they were embraced by so many. Eagerness for liberty in its widest sense, and freedom from obligations voluntarily incurred were certainly the ruling motives with very many. And the arm of civil power was very often called in, and, wherever the reformation extended, the flame of revolution was speedily kindled. In some countries the Protestant confession was introduced and established by the patronage of the court. In England, for example, the king almost forced the reformation upon an unwilling people. When the arm of human power united with the gratification of passion, we need not wonder at the progress of the new doctrines.

Thirdly, It is seriously to be questioned

whether demolition was not the principal work of Protestantism, whether any religion having a positive character was established by it. The first truths proposed by Luther did not stand even during his lifetime. Innumerable teachers arose, each with a new doctrine of their own, or a new version of an old one. The landmarks of the first reformers were soon swept away, and it is difficult to gather any positive creed from the host of their followers. Negative teaching there certainly was, greater and greater departure from the catholic faith; but in this we see only the hand of the destroyer, not the work of the master-builder. Men lost the faith which they had, and gained opinions of a doubtful nature which could hardly be called faith, and many ceased to have any religious belief at all. Under all these circumstances it will be difficult to predicate any

real success to the system of Protestantism as it first appeared to the world. There are very few at this day who hold the views of the early reformers; and although nations and kingdoms fell away from the Catholic Church, this is no more the proof of the establishment of a true religion, than a wide-spread revolution is the necessary preface to a solid and permanent government. Scarcely any thing that Luther and his co-workers established, has remained, except prejudice and hostility to the catholic religion.

4. In judging of the influence of Protestantism upon the mind and heart of man, we must, with all candor, weigh those results which are justly to be attributed to it alone. If any system of doctrine purifies men from vice, and leads them to the practice of high virtue, it is so far an evidence of divine favor. But in Protestantism we must separate any of

the doctrines received and professed before the Reformation from those which were new, and only take into consideration that which is peculiar to itself. It would be unfair to give the reformers the credit of the faith believed, and practised before their own day, and before the revolution of which they were the promoters. We ask, then, has Protestantism been the parent of morality and high virtue, and has its influence upon mankind been salutary? Let us examine these three points, its effect upon faith, upon morals, and upon society in general.

1. Faith in God's revelation lies confessedly at the foundation of all that tends to man's highest good. If God has made a revelation, and man rejects it, he does himself and those whom he can influence the greatest possible injury. For he does all in his power to divert man from the great su-

pernatural destiny to which he is called. Any thing, then, which shakes confidence in revealed truth is of the greatest possible evil to society, and could hardly be ascribed to God. Now, we say that such was the result of Protestantism. It took away from mankind the living teacher on whose words for generations the faithful had rested, and it gave no substitute. It remitted men to the Bible, there to learn their faith, but gave no sufficient proofs of the inspiration of the Scriptures, nor any unerring clue to their interpretation. The motives of credibility which reason demands for assenting to a revelation were all taken away, or so confused that they lost their power to persuade. Upright men asked for clear explanations and arguments in favor of Christianity, and received nothing satisfactory, and so gave up all in disgust. Reason, shocked with the discordance and

antagonism which characterized the professors of the new system, recoiled upon blank infidelity. Change after change passed over the scene, as every day marked the birth of some new theory, or the organization of some new church. Thus may really be attributed to the reformation, the divisions which now prevail among Christians, the scepticism and indifference which reign wherever that religious movement has had sway. Can God be called the author of such confusion, or will any one honestly say that such a state of things is pleasing to Him who is Truth unchanging and Mercy ineffable? Is it of no consequence that disunion and uncertainty as to all the essentials of Christian belief are the inseparable characteristics of Protestantism wherever it is to be found?

2. As faith in the divine being is the foundation of morality, we would naturally

look for serious results upon the morals of men wherever it is attacked or subverted. Nothing sooner flows into the life of man than any resistance to the divine light. We are far from accusing Protestants of immorality, nor do we accuse them of consistency with their own principles. The majority of them are little concerned with theories, and many never reflect upon the creed they have received from their parents or associates. But the tendency of their system is to infidelity, and the tendency of infidelity is to immorality. The forgetfulness of God in the daily concerns of life leads at once to the practical denial of His moral government. We charge this denial to Protestantism, and we find in it many fruitful sources of immorality. It shakes, by its system of negations, all our confidence in the great facts of revelation; and as these facts can be overlooked

by no intelligent mind, it introduces doubt into all man's relations with his Maker. By many the divine providence is reduced to an inexorable fate, and by nearly all Protestants the value of good works is denied. The doctrine of retribution in a future state has ceased to be held by some of the new sects; while the ideas of hell and purgatory are dismissed as the dreams of ancient and unenlightened days. Exhortations to virtue are often founded solely on self-love, wherein we are taught that man is happier if he break not the laws of his being. Secret sins, known only to God and the sinner, do not enter into the common estimate of vice, while all notion of penance or austerity is laughed at as the delusion of weak or superstitious minds. Under these circumstances, it can hardly be alleged that Protestantism leads to high morality; and the real virtue which we see

among its followers is owing to the doctrines which they hold in common with the Catholic Church, and to the grace of God which would guide them to a better and truer faith. The principle of private judgment is the logical foundation of infidelity, while among Catholics the immorality which exists is due simply to the transgression of the plain commands of their religion, for which the church can in no way be made responsible.

3. Society, as constituted by Christian principles and enlightened by supernatural faith, owes its existence to the Catholic Church. The rights and duties springing from the relations of the individual to the family and to the state are all established by the law of Christianity. The dignity of woman, the sacredness of marriage, the principle of subjection to lawful authority, are evident by the sanctions of revelation, and the church which

converted the world from barbarism and the dark superstitions of paganism is the founder of order and the mother of all true social progress. Any movement which disturbs the columns on which society rests is fruitful of untold evils. If, then, the Protestant reformation has shaken the principle of obedience to just authority, and opened the way to license, if, under the holy name of liberty, it has kindled the fires of revolution, then has it laid the axe to the very root of society and given its voice in favor of anarchy. If it has taken from the sanctity and indissolubility of the marriage bond, by lowering that divinely appointed relation to a mere human contract from which the parties can be freed by human tribunals, then has it uprooted the very foundations of social order. We leave the candid student of history to determine these questions of fact, and in the light of events trans-

piring every day around us, to judge where the evils which threaten the destruction of the family and the state shall find their proper remedy. The experience of three hundred years ought to be a faithful teacher, if men would only listen and reflect.

Certainly the doctrines of Protestantism can bring no evidence of divine sanction by the fruits of their influence upon the world. They have done their most to do away with revealed truth, to produce doubt as to all things supernatural, to lead men to infidelity, and so to introduce disorder into all the relations of life. Such doctrines with such results cannot be from God, the ever prolific source of harmony and beauty, who in all His works showeth forth not only the glory of His power, but also the perfection of His wisdom.

IV.

We have seen in a former lecture that a true revelation from God ought to have the means of extending itself and preserving its vitality from age to age. We have also proved that it would be against reason to suppose that God would introduce into the world, by signs and wonders, a revelation, and then allow it to die away or be lost in the confusions of opinion. As every tree came from the divine hand having its seed in itself, so the more glorious fabric of high and holy truth must have the principle of life in its own bosom. Reason could suggest to us no other way of teaching mankind than by the lips of a competent teacher, and therefore, where such an instrumentality is wanting, how shall the mind be enlightened? This leads us to our concluding test, with

which we shall leave our present argument. Protestantism has no unerring teacher, no body of essential doctrine, is ever subject to variations which are destructive of all faith, and, therefore, has no vitality and cannot be a messenger from on high.

1. As we have fully shown, there can be no teacher where the individual mind is made the judge of the intrinsic credibility of every truth proposed. And, in fact, among Protestants all infallibility is denied in express words; and, even if the Scriptures be admitted infallible, an unerring interpreter is not to be found. We conclude at once that he who does not teach infallibly does not teach at all, and that where infallibility does not exist there is no teacher in the strict sense of the word. There was no such authority among Protestants in the beginning, and there is no provision for continuing it even if there

had been. No line of teachers exists, since, in all the reformed churches, power flows from the flock to the pastor—from below, and not from above. All distinction between the priesthood and the laity by any divine appointment, is removed. The people have as much right to study the Scriptures as the pastors. The idea of a commission from God to a body of teachers, having power to confer their own powers upon their successors, was abandoned at the very first stage of the Reformation. This was a necessary step to justify the secession from Catholic Christendom and the renunciation of the ministry regularly descended from the apostles of Christ. In the various churches which were then constituted, the election of the ministry came from the people, or was assumed without any external call, and, although some of these organizations have continued to the

present time, they have been subject to the most essential variations. There is no continuity of life in Protestantism, no power to reproduce its like. And we are not aware of any one of the reformed churches which claims to teach with authority. If even Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, and Melancthon were inspired men, there is no one to represent them at this day, no one who bears the credentials of mission from them, while, in the confusion of claimants upholding different opinions, the inquirer for truth meets with no definite answer. We do not see how he can find a response to the question, "What shall I do to be saved?"

2. Not only is there no teacher whose word is reliable, but there is not even a creed or body of essential doctrine. We argue strictly when we give to Protestants all the liberty which they claim, and decide that no

man and no sect has a right to dictate to another. Comparing, therefore, the testimonies of the various sects, we find no body of truth to which all agree. In fact, we do not find one single doctrine to which all subscribe, and, as we are not willing to set one above another, we have no test whatever of orthodoxy. Where, then, is the revelation of Christ? What is Protestantism, that we may define and know it? We return to our first assertion. It is a system which denies certain truths, which proposes nothing whatever to faith, a system of negations which can consistently present nothing positive to the mind. Where, then, there can theoretically be no doctrine to be taught, there is no place for a teacher.

3. Any variation in teaching is an argument against the authority proposing a dogma, and is destructive of the dogma itself.

If the first reformers had no mission from God for the extraordinary work they undertook, they were the most miserable of impostors. If they had such mission, the truths they taught were divine and unchangeable. Any departure from these truths supposes either the introduction of error, or that the original teachers were not from God. Variations therefore break down the whole system, and leave no foundation whatever for faith. The prophet that hesitates or vacillates in the message he has to deliver is no apostle from on high. His confusions mark the heresiarch and the seducer. Now, we are bold enough to declare, first, That all the leaders of the Reformation hesitated in their utterance of doctrine, and were subject to strange variations of opinion. Which is the true Protestantism, that which they began, or that which they left?

Secondly. So great and radical changes have passed over the face of reformed Christianity, that there no longer exists the Protestantism which they begun or left. Old age does not necessarily destroy identity; but here we have nothing to remind us of what has been, save the denial of the Catholic religion and the assumed right of private judgment.

We do not know how the honest mind can find the motives of faith in such a system, and do not wonder that, failing to see any traces of divine authority, it falls, where so many have been wrecked, in blank infidelity. Judged by the true signs of vitality, Protestantism has no life, no ability to contend with the decay which attends all the ravages of time, and no prospect of a future. The evils which it has engendered may live from age to age, and be fruitful of manifold results in

intellectual and spiritual ruin ; but itself, the parent of disorder and infidelity, has changed its face with the shifting of each scene, and its constant variations mark the power of death which has dominion over all human things.

Here, then, we rest the argument which establishes that there is no connection between divine revelation and Protestantism. Viewed as a system in the abstract, or as existing in the various sects which bear its banner, it has not even one mark by which the reason can know it as the work of God. Tried by the fair conclusions of the understanding, it has already been condemned as a tissue of inconsistencies which no rational mind can accept. Will it be believed that they who have not one reasonable ground of belief, not one foot on which to stand, attempt to array reason against the Catholic faith, as if stern logic did not utterly confound their

every position? Would to God that the earnest and sincere would but open their eyes to the plain deductions of reason, and follow the teachings of their own intelligence. It would lead them to eschew contradictions, to cast aside prejudice unworthy of any reasonable mind, and to fear not truth in any phase in which it presents itself. Protestantism can never be made to bear the stamp of divine revelation, and the attempt so to represent it before mankind will end in disbelief of all things supernatural and contempt for all religion. History is our witness that we do not exaggerate. God hath set His signs high in heaven, that they may fail not to stand as lasting testimonies; and the light of nature leads to that of grace, and reason guides to the threshold of faith. In all, God guides the soul formed in His own image, Himself the unchanging truth, the great end, and sovereign rest of His creatures.



LECTURE V.



REVELATION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.



WE approach the end of our short discussion. Having called reason and nature to our aid, we have been able to determine the conditions of a revelation, and by them we have tried Protestantism, and have not found one proof or one sign of the divine sanction. Nothing remains but to test, in the same manner, the Catholic Church. If she will not stand these tests, then she must be discarded. If she satisfies all these conditions of reason, then every rational man must confess her to be

the messenger of truth, the house of God and gate of heaven.

Let us proceed, as in our last lecture, to define the Catholic Church, to examine her constitution, that we may know if she has the qualities necessary to a teacher, to ask for the proofs of her divine mission, and to determine whether she has a true vitality with the promise of perseverance in the future.

I.

The Catholic Church is that one body of Christians which, recognizing Christ as her founder and invisible head, recognizes the successor of St. Peter as her head upon earth, and is, therefore, bound together by the most rigid unity. She is called sometimes the Holy Roman Church, not on account of any nationality, for she is essentially Catholic, but on

account of her relations to the Apostolic See and her august pastor. Throughout the world she is easily known by all men, having everywhere an unmistakable identity. No counterfeit has been able to retain either her name or image. Subject to various fortunes, time has not weakened her strength nor taken from her vigor. Schisms and heresies have arisen, but have been unable to mar her unity or disturb the distinctness of her teaching. No one has ever mistaken any thing else for her. Ancient eastern sees have rebelled against her authority, and wandered from her sheltering arms; yet in their faded and lifeless fires no one can recognize the unction of Pentecost, and the quickening breath of the Word made Flesh. Men put on her garments and borrow her majestic ceremonial, yet the sober world looks on as at the mimicry of the stage or

the pantomime of the humorous. The lion's skin does not make the lion, nor the dress the man. That which she is, nothing else can be, and in her kind she stands solitary, without a rival. It is a fact that she has existed since the days of Christ, and that her ministry descends in an unbroken line from the Apostles. No fact is more evident than this, and it is also admitted that for fourteen centuries she was the only representative of Christianity upon earth. The Reformation, as Protestants have termed it, caused the falling off of large numbers of her priests and people, but did not disturb her unity, shake her doctrine, or discourage her in the work of evangelizing the world. Misrepresentation and calumny have turned many away from her; but above all she has persevered, and stands before mankind at this day with the same claims of divine mission that she

has ever made. There is something wonderful in her power wherever she makes herself known. No student of history can overlook her, no thinking man can ignore her. She is the most striking feature on the page of time since the birth of Jesus Christ. All the world knows that she professes to be the one Church of God, to which all His promises are made, the divinely inspired oracle of truth to the nations. If such claims are just, then there is the closest connection between her and revelation, since she is its keeper and expounder, "the pillar and ground of the truth." Let us, with honest minds, examine the proof she can give of so high and important a mission.

II.

Our former lectures, which have laid down the relations of reason to faith, have removed

any preliminary difficulties which might be raised as to the manner of God's revelation or the mode which He may deem best for its preservation. There is no reason whatever why the Catholic Church should not be that which she claims to be, and no repugnance on the part of God that He should make her such. All is resolved into a question of fact, to be determined by evidence. Before, however, we approach the proofs of her divine mission, we must ask if she is really a teacher, with the qualities of which our reason has shown the necessity. Here, then, we shall find that she does teach; that in so doing she discharges her office with clearness subject to the comprehension of any one, and with the assurance of an infallible authority; and that she is easily accessible to all mankind.

I. No one disputes the fact that the Catho-

lic Church is a teacher, maintaining certain truths as necessary to salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ. She realizes the words spoken to the Apostles: "Go ye therefore and *teach* all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."* Her principal office is to uphold the faith which she has received, and no one can be admitted to her communion or remain in her fold who does not accept the truths which she delivers. In these matters she proposes nothing to opinion, but all to faith founded on the veracity of God. In matters not revealed there is scope for speculation, but the reasonable mind can only *believe* that which the divine voice declares to be true, and therefore beyond the reach of doubt. Such is the characteristic of the Catholic Church, and we are

* St. Matthew xxviii. 19.

not acquainted with any other body that teaches in like manner.

2. In the method of her teaching we also find clearness and distinctness, which leave no room for misapprehension. There is no hesitation as to the truth revealed, no proposal to excite doubt or stimulate investigation. She does not say to the inquirer, "I will give you the benefit of my opinion, and then leave you to judge for yourself." She simply answers, "This is the truth, fixed and certain, because it has been taught by God, who cannot deceive nor be deceived." From that sacred trust no temptation has induced her to swerve. There is not a Catholic in all the earth who is left in any uncertainty, since the doctrines of revelation are as explicitly contained in the smallest catechism as in the most labored theology. The youngest child has all that the most learned scholar has of

essential truth, and the perfect accord which prevails throughout her whole communion shows that she does teach with distinctness. When, through the frailty of men, errors arise, she is quick to detect and expose them, so that in her wide-spread borders there can be no jarring voice, no discord to mar the harmonies of her creed. So far she is just what man needs—a guide which never vacillates, answering distinctly the great questions of the soul, and leading the mind to certitude, and therefore to peace.

3. All this would, however, be of no use, nay, it would be fraught with the greatest evil, if she were not an *infallible* teacher. Without unmistakable authority she would only lead men into error, and perhaps hopeless blindness. We trust that it has been sufficiently shown that God must teach infallibly if He teach at all, and that therefore any agency

which He employs is necessarily kept from error. That can be no agency of His which supports falsehood or conducts to vice. There has been much unnecessary misconception upon this point so evident to reason. The infallibility which the church claims, results from the fact that God was her founder, and that He promised to guide and keep her in the mission on which He sent her. He sent her to teach, and therefore was bound to prevent her teaching error in His name. "You have not chosen me," said our Lord to the Apostles, "but I have chosen you, and have appointed you, that you should go, and should bring forth fruit, and your fruit should remain."* "When the Spirit of truth shall come, He shall teach you all truth."† It was of the highest interest to Jesus Christ Him-

* St. John xv. 16.

† St. John xvi. 13.

self that the doctrines He came at so much cost to teach should be maintained pure among men whom He came to redeem, and that His revelation should not die out, as such a failure would be an argument against His divinity. Therefore, in perfect consistency, the Catholic Church claims infallibility, the first and most essential requisite of a teacher of supernatural truth.

4. The church is so accessible to us that reason itself could not devise any way by which God could more easily teach mankind. No one man could reach the entire world, no line of individual teachers could be heard by all tribes and tongues. But here a vast society spreads itself throughout the earth, and takes of every nation into its bosom, and sends its messengers to every clime. In Catholicity, unity is still preserved, that so the one voice may speak everywhere, and that in

all lands one faith may be preached. We confess that all this presupposes the constant exercise of divine power. But are we not speaking of things supernatural, of God's way of making known His revelation to men? Are we, then, not to expect the continual aid of that same Almighty hand which proposed at first to intervene for man's salvation? Are we not by "one Spirit baptized into one body"? Is not the Church called "the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who filleth all in all"? If we abandon the supernatural character of the agency by which revelation is preserved, we may as well abandon revelation itself. So far, therefore, as reason can guide us, it shows to us that the Catholic Church has all the qualities of a teacher, and is fit for the office of instructing mankind. Her perfect unity, which no vicissitudes have been able to break, speaks everywhere of one

unchangeable faith in utterances too plain to be misunderstood. No one can be at any loss where to find her, nor in any doubt as to what her teaching is. There is nothing on earth to be compared to her. Her existence is a great fact which no intelligent mind can ignore, and if she be not a divine teacher, there is none upon earth. There is no other body which even claims her office, and hence we are left to the conclusion that either she must be from God or that He has no representative upon earth.

III.

The Catholic Church, then, appears before us with all the qualities necessary to be the agency in making known and preserving God's revelation. So far, we find nothing which offends our reason; but, on the con-

trary, many things which answer to the very demands of our nature.

But will she be able to present the world with proofs of her divine mission such as we have shown to be sufficient? This is the great question, which we propose now to settle, and in such a manner as shall carry conviction to every honest mind.

1. In the remarks we are about to make, we shall refer to the Scriptures as authentic histories of facts, waiving altogether for the moment the question of their inspiration. The Catholic Church builds her claims on the divinity of Jesus Christ, her founder. Several important inquiries at once arise in relation to these claims which ought to be examined before we proceed to the proofs which are given by miracles. These inquiries are, Who is Jesus Christ? Did He found the Catholic Church, and for what purpose?

Did He promise that it should continue to the end of time? Is the body known as the Roman Catholic Church the identical one which He founded?

In reply to the first question, we declare that Jesus Christ is God and Man in one person; that there was no doubt of His manhood, and that, being perfect Man, He professed to be God; that He is the second person of the Holy Trinity, incarnate, or the eternal Word made flesh. We need advance no proofs to show that He was man, since his life is a matter of the world's history, and His ignominious sufferings are written on its saddest page. That He was God also, His words and acts sufficiently proved.

“No man hath ascended into heaven, but He that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven. . . . For God

so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish but have life everlasting.”*

“The Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He did not only break the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal to God. . . . Then Jesus said, As the Father raiseth up the dead and giveth life, so the Son also giveth life to whom He will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son, that all men may honor the Son as they honor the Father. He who honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father who hath sent Him.”†

“Amen, amen, I say unto you, before Abraham was made I am.”‡

“Dost thou believe in the Son of God?”

* St. John iii. 13-16.

† St. John v. 18-23.

‡ St. John viii. 53.

He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him? And Jesus saith to him, Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.”*

“I and the Father are one.”† “He that seeth me seeth the Father also.”‡

To these plain words of Jesus Christ we add the language of St. John :

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”§

The burden of His accusation before the Jews, was blasphemy in that He had declared Himself the Son of God, and this was the title which He assumed, and which was

* St. John ix. 35-7.

† St. John x. 30.

‡ St. John xiv. 9.

§ St. John i. 1, 14.

even affirmed beneath the cross. So says St. Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews. "God having spoken on divers occasions, and many ways, in times past, unto the fathers, by the prophets: last of all, in these days hath spoken to us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world."*

That the claims of Jesus Christ were true is abundantly proved by His miracles, wrought so many times and in the presence of numerous and competent witnesses. The evidence of these miracles is unquestionable, and must be received by every honest mind on the plainest principles of reason. His own death and resurrection were predicted by Himself, and took place precisely according to His words. The greatest of all miracles was His

* E. Hebrews i. 1-2.

resurrection, of which there are testimonies such as no one can refuse to accept. As He died publicly on a cross, so He rose from the grave in the presence of the guard who were watching His sepulchre, and was seen and known by many and indubitable witnesses. Therefore, on the simplest principles of evidence, no one can doubt that He was precisely what He professed to be—the Son of God, made man for our salvation.

The second question admits of an easy answer. The Scriptures record the fact that the Church was established by Him, and for the purpose of teaching the world the truths He came to make known.

“And it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray, and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God, and when it was day He called His dis-

ciples, and He chose twelve of them whom also He named Apostles.”*

“And if he will not hear the Church, let him be unto thee as the heathen and the publican. Amen, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.”†

“And I say to thee (Simon) that thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”‡

The Acts of the Apostles record the formation and constant increase of the Church which Jesus Christ established.

“And the Lord added daily to their society (that of the Apostles) such as should be saved.”§

* St. Luke vi. 12, 13.

† St. Matthew xviii 16. 17.

‡ St. Matthew xvi. 18.

§ Acts ii. 47.

“Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.”*

These texts, with many others which might be quoted, leave no doubt of the fact that Christ founded a Church and provided all the necessary means for its existence. The purpose for which He established it, is also plainly shown by the same historical testimony.

“All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and *teach* all nations ; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”†

* Acts xx. 28.

† St. Matthew xxviii. 18-20.

“When He, the spirit of truth, shall come, He shall teach you all truth.”*

“The house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”†

Jésus Christ came as a teacher to reveal to man the way of salvation through His blood. There is no doubt, then, that the end of the Church which He formed is to make known to all mankind the blessed truths which He taught.

But, thirdly, was it His intention that this Church should continue to the end of time? If the object of His coming into the world was to reveal to men new and saving truths, and if the end of the Church was to teach those truths to the successive generations of mankind, then by the plainest deductions of

* St. John xvi. 13.

† I St. Timothy iii. 15.

reason, the Church ought to continue until the work for which it was instituted is accomplished. It is absurd to suppose that Christ died and sent out His Apostles for the benefit of only one age, leaving all who were to come after without any guidance, and in danger of forgetting all He had taught at so great a cost. Whatever He did, must have been for the advantage of the whole world, as the evangelist tells us, He was "the true light, that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." But we are not left even to the evident deductions of reason; we have the words of Christ Himself assuring us that His Church shall never fail.

"Upon this rock will I build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

* St. Matthew xvi. 18.

“Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.” *

“I have chosen you and appointed you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” †

As to the question whether the Roman Catholic Church is the identical church which Jesus Christ founded, we very briefly reply. It is the lineal successor of that church, having all its essential notes, unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and sanctity. The uninterrupted succession of bishops can at once be traced to the Apostles, while there are many testimonies of identity, as, for example, the series of fathers and doctors, the decrees of councils, general and particular, and monuments of a complete ecclesiastical unity. There have been heresies and schisms; but as revolutions in states and even

* St. Matthew xxviii. 20.

† St. John xv. 16.

secessions of provinces do not impair the identity of a kingdom, so no divisions have ever been able to break the unity of the Catholic Church. It alone has prescription and any just claims to antiquity. Attempts to identify any of the reformed bodies with the ancient ecclesiastical organization, are singular failures, both logically and historically.

Again, the Roman Catholic Church is the only body existing with the necessary qualities of unity in discipline and infallibility in teaching. The fact that no one of the Protestant churches makes claim to such qualities is sufficient proof that they are all of human origin, and, therefore, in no way formed by the hands of Jesus Christ. And so we come to the conclusion that either the Roman Catholic Church is the church which our Lord established or that there is no such

church on earth. There was a long time when all who professed themselves Christians acknowledged the office and powers of that church, for there was no other Christian communion in the world. And in these latter unhappy days of dissent, there is no rival which even pretends to be what that church is, or assumes to teach men with authority from God. We cannot admit that the church which Jesus Christ founded has become corrupt, or ceased to exist, without making His words untrue; and if we make Him guilty of ignorance or falsehood, we cannot believe Him to be God; and if we do not believe Him to be God, as He professed to be, we actually declare Him an impostor, and the whole fabric of Christianity falls to the ground. Nay, even more, the principles of reason and the laws of evidence are also subverted, and man becomes a scep-

tic, without light and without God. So closely connected are the first truths of revelation with the claims of the Catholic Church that, to an honest mind, they really stand or fall together.

We are now prepared to examine the proofs which can be given to show the divine mission of the Catholic Church, according to the tests laid down in the preceding lectures. Having shown the continuity of this church with the revelation introduced into this world by Jesus Christ, we proceed in regular order.

1. Miracles are necessary, in the beginning of any supernatural intervention from God, to authenticate the messenger employed by Him. A revelation once established by indubitable evidence needs no further authentication. It stands for ever, and the precepts

it enjoins are binding until their abrogation by divine authority manifested under the same nature of proofs. Jesus Christ was the founder of the Catholic Church, as we have demonstrated, and His mission was abundantly attested by miracles more frequent and remarkable than those of any prophet who had preceded Him. His Apostles, also, who were sent in His name, worked many and remarkable miracles in the presence of witnesses hostile to their religion and totally indisposed to deceive. The fact that these wonders were wrought is generally admitted as a matter of history, and cannot be honestly contradicted. We have, then, sufficient evidence to put beyond all question the divine mission of Christ and His Apostles

The church, therefore, which owes its existence to their labors has the full weight of

the evidence which authenticated them. It must in reason be admitted the teacher of truth until, by the same proofs, a new messenger be substituted in its place. On no other principles can the miracles of Jesus Christ and His Apostles be made to bear upon any system of Christianity existing at this day. For Christianity, introduced into this world by means of a founder whose deeds are part of human history, must have an historical life, and be treated as the rigid continuation of the mission of Christ. He who asserts that the Catholic Church is not the lineal successor of the church established by Christ asserts, at the same moment, the failure, and at an early day, of the revelation made known through Him, and the utter incompetency of the means He employed. Yet, unnecessary as they are to rigid evidence, miracles have never ceased in the

ages all along to testify to the divine character of the church. They have occurred in every age, and even in our own day. Even unbelievers have admitted this, and though they have sometimes referred them to arts of designing men, yet, in any well-attested case, there has been no evidence of such arts, and no possibility of their exercise if there had been any disposition to deceive. Miracles, such as these we allude to, have happened in public sight and before witnesses every way competent, and have been of such a nature that no human power could have produced them. Not one saint is added to the calendar of the church without the evidence of miracles wrought through his means. And the testimony is sifted and tried by every ingenuity, lest there should be deception or mistake of the imagination. Persons unacquainted with the processes of the Catholic

Church would be surprised at the rigor with which the evidence of any thing supernatural is treated, and at the length of time occupied in such investigations. If the well-substantiated miracles of the church be not admitted, then nothing superhuman can be allowed. The wonderful works of Christ and His Apostles have no stronger weight of testimony. We have heard of those who are willing to receive only the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, and at once reject all others because they are not there mentioned. We need not say that any honest mind will see at once that such a course is the fruit of ignorance and prejudice, and contrary to every dictate of reason.

We find, therefore, the Catholic Church to have been well authenticated at her foundation, and that, through the centuries of her existence, she has given many and unmis-

takable proofs of her divine character. In this respect, as in many others, she stands solitary and alone, having no rival on earth.

2. The testimony of prophecy is not wanting to confirm the divine character of Jesus Christ and His Church. In the first place, the prophets of the old law had distinctly predicted His generation of the Blessed Virgin, His office, and His sufferings, and these predictions were exactly fulfilled in Him and in no other person.

“The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a *Virgin* shall conceive, and bear a son; and shall call his name Emmanuel.”*

“A child is born unto us, and a son is given unto us, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the

* Isaias vii. 14.

mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace.”*

“He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth. He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and he shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearer, and He shall not open His mouth.”†

“And after sixty-two weeks Christ shall be slain, and the people that shall deny Him shall not be His. And a people with their leader that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.”‡

Our Lord Himself gave many proofs of His divine knowledge, not only in reading the hearts of man, but in distinct predictions of the future. Such were the prophecies by which He foretold the nature and circumstances of His passion and resurrection, the

* Isaias ix. 6.

† Isaias liii. 7.

‡ Daniel ix. 26.

denial of St. Peter, the treason of Judas, the dispersion of His disciples, and many similar events. He predicted also the diffusion of His Gospel throughout the Gentile world, the perpetuity of the church which He was to build upon Peter, the persecution and martyrdom of His Apostles. Distinguished among all is His wonderful prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, which, by the testimony of heathen writers, was fulfilled to the very letter. And even, three centuries after, when Julian the Apostate endeavored to rebuild the temple, the hand of God was evident in the signs and wonders which rendered futile his blasphemous audacity. There can, therefore, be no doubt that Jesus Christ was a true prophet, and that His words are to be taken in their literal sense as the words of God. The system which He founded cannot fail, and the church which

He established rests on His divine authority.

That the gift of prophecy has been poured out at various times upon many members of His Church there can be no doubt; and although this has not been for the authentication of a revelation already made and sufficiently attested, yet it has always been in confirmation of Catholic faith, and to the exaltation of the true religion.

3. The progress of the Catholic Church has been so wonderful that this alone, under all the circumstances, is proof of her divine origin. We find arrayed against her all human power, and every kind of opposition, both moral and physical. Her origin from a Jew crucified in extraordinary ignominy; the condition of twelve rude fishermen who were her Apostles; the nature of her doctrine, involving mysteries on the one side, and on the other declaring constant war against hu-

man passions, and inculcating precepts difficult of observation; the profession of Judaism and heathenism for many ages; the practices of idolatry, with all the gross superstitions that accompanied them—all these things conspired to render the progress of Christianity possible only by divine power. To this must be added likewise the pride of philosophers, the avarice of the priests, and the entire strength of the civil arm employed to crush out the new religion by a wide-spread cruelty, and a persecution unparalleled in the annals of time. In spite of all these difficulties, the Catholic Church took lasting root in Judea, where her Master had been crucified, and, passing the bounds even of Galilee, spread throughout the Gentile world, and soon made the capital of heathenism, from which the proud Cæsars ruled the world, the seat of its chief bishop. The Apostles and the first

bishops became martyrs for the truth they preached, and Christians everywhere were subjected to exile and death; yet above all their religion triumphed. The civil power was extended to crush it, the passions of men were incensed against it, yet no force was able to subdue its wonderful vitality. The Apostles, relying upon the promises and power of Christ, went through the nations with the success of conquerors; so that after a few years St. Peter, St. James, and St. Jude were able to write "Catholic Epistles" to the whole world. St. Paul does not hesitate to assert that the Gospel had brought forth fruit in the whole world, (Coloss. i. 6,) and that the faith of the Romans was spoken of throughout the earth. (Rom. i. 8.) From the most certain monuments we know that an immense multitude of Christians flourished in the first three ages, and that, after the most severe per-

secution under Diocletian, in which the heathen boasted that they would extinguish utterly the religion of Christ, the greatest portion of the Roman empire was united to the Catholic Church. Now, no one can attribute this success to any human power, of which there is no trace, and therefore it must be ascribed to God alone, who, as He had many times authenticated the Gospel by miracles, caused it to live and increase by the still greater exercise of His divine power. For in truth the progress of the Christian religion is the greatest of all miracles. The form in which Christianity diffused itself was a yet greater evidence of continual divine assistance, for everywhere was preserved the most rigid unity in faith and discipline. Heresies which arose only proved the supernatural power of the Church, which could detect and resist them.

The wonderful *preservation* of the Catholic Church even to our own day, through the terrible vicissitudes of nineteen centuries, is another proof that she is the only representative of Christianity, and that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was her founder. In the history of the Catholic Church, we behold the perpetual spectacle of every kind of opposition on the one side and continual triumph on the other. She alone has wonderfully fulfilled the prophecy, "Thy gates shall be open continually: they shall not be shut day nor night, that the strength of the Gentiles may be brought to thee, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish."* "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper."†

Against her have conspired the Jew and

* Isaias lx. 11, 12.

† Isaias liv. 17.

the Pagan, the Persian and the Islamite ; numerous sects of every kind, from the earlier heretics to the more virulent divisions of Protestantism ; wars without and contentions within. And often arrayed on the side of these hostile sects have been the most powerful kings, who have left no means untried to extinguish the Catholic religion. And yet the Church has held her way in spite of every opposition, regaining in one age the children she lost in another, and ever repairing her losses with a superhuman vitality. There is no nation nor kingdom which has lived any thing like her memorable life, or been subject to her strange vicissitudes. She has seen her enemies one by one pass away before her face, and even the monuments of their mighty power have crumbled into dust. Surely such a history as hers is an evidence of more than human power, a proof that she alone is

the inheritor of the graces and miracles of Pentecost. And at this day, when men have so often foretold her extinction, she appears before the world with all the energy of youth and every promise of perpetuity. She is the only guardian of revelation, the only teacher of a distinct and unalterable creed. Rationalists call her obsolete amid the mighty marches of modern society, but yet she applies herself with vigor to the needs of the age, and, judging from the past, she will live and flourish when their vagaries are forgotten. To our minds, the very existence of the Catholic Church is one of the most striking of miracles, one of the most convincing of proofs that God is her founder. Were man her author, she would have long ago succumbed to the law of decay and the terrible arms which have been used against her.

4. The doctrines taught by the Catholic Church are of such a nature, and their influence upon mankind has been so beneficial, that herein is found another proof of her divine mission. Her teaching is worthy of God, and her discipline is formed to lead men to the highest degree of perfection. The mysteries which she proposes to our faith elevate all our ideas of the divine wisdom and mercy. They are entirely in accordance with all we know of God in nature, and they lead to an admiration and love of Him which become intelligent creatures redeemed by the wonderful condescension of their Creator. All her dogmas stand upon the sole word of God, and yet they are calculated in themselves to exalt man even in the sphere of intellect.

And as for their influence on the heart and life of man, we need only say that they

tend directly to purify the soul from sin, to lead it in the path of self-denial and self-conquest, and so to union with the infinite holiness. No reasonable mind would judge of the Catholic religion from its unfaithful members. Let any one look well to those whose steps are ordered by the strict observance of its precepts, and in them he shall find purity, reverence of God, faith in His providence, and every virtue. The power of our religion goes down to the very inmost recesses of the heart, and purifies the fountain whence human actions proceed. It were vain to speak of individual lives, whose exact merits are known to the omniscient eye alone; but any one may judge of the results, which are evident upon the face of society. And the Catholic Church alone is the promoter and mother of heroic virtue, leading her children in the higher paths,

from which the world in its fever of passion shrinks back. She alone can point to a noble army of martyrs, an unending train of confessors, a holy choir of virgins, who have counted all things but dross that they might win Christ and follow closely His footsteps. Let men reason as they may, they must admit that here is a victory over the flesh, a realization of the invisible and eternal, a high morality of which no spirit of evil can be the author. They who are led by the teaching of the Catholic Church are trained in the principles of faith and obedience which lie at the foundation of all religion. And were men more guided by her wise counsels, how soon would the evils which menace social order pass away, how quickly would be dispelled the errors which threaten to destroy the hopes of all civil government! Did time allow, we might easily take up each portion

of the Catholic creed, and show its salutary influence upon the human heart. While man is lifted up toward his Maker, and taught to look beyond the things of sense, he loses nothing of his responsibility. Grace extinguishes not the powers of nature, but only elevates them, and enables man to do good works meritorious of reward, in the true and just probation which is to terminate by an impartial judgment such as an Omniscient God alone can make. Here are all the incentives to virtue that can be drawn from the great motives of fear and love. With a fixed and certain creed, with moral obligations clearly defined, the Catholic has a plain and simple course. If he fail of peace here and happiness hereafter, it will be through his own inexcusable fault. Before him is continually placed the all-perfect example of his Master, Jesus Christ, with its divine les-

sons of patience, meekness, and self-sacrifice. And around him are the many witnesses who have gone before to animate and encourage him by their good deeds—the saints of the church, whose virtue the world itself applauds, the teachers of all that is high and holy. To the Catholic religion belongs the honor of such lives, for she formed them in her school, and from her inspirations they drew their vigor and beauty.

Far different is it with Protestantism, which has no distinctive features, no one creed, no one school of morality. And the virtue which is seen among its adherents is really to be attributed to doctrines of the ancient creed, which it has retained, rather than to the denials or negative statements which are its peculiarity, and which, from their very nature, can have no positive influence upon the heart and life.

IV.

We have only now to ask if the Catholic Church, with all the qualities we have seen, and the proofs of divine mission we have examined, has a true life and the promise of perseverance.

In answer to this question we need only argue from the past, and conclude that an organization which has endured through so many centuries and in spite of so many unexampled persecutions will certainly withstand any future attack which enemies visible or invisible may bring against it. Nothing but a divine power could have kept alive the Catholic Church in the clash of conflicts which have cast many a mighty kingdom into oblivion. The same divine power will preserve her to the end, and until her work is accomplished. God's promises cannot fail,

and, as we have demonstrated, she alone is the fulfilment of His gracious word.

And there is a characteristic of true vitality which belongs to her, and to nothing else upon earth, which is an unmistakable sign of her divine origin. While the world changes, and seasons show the power of decay over all things human, she never changes. She has ever the same doctrine, the same exhortations to virtue, the same way of dealing with souls. Her features are ever the same, easily known, and strongly marked; and if you go back to the early day, or seek for her in later days, you will find the same unvarying faith, the same inflexibility in teaching the word of life committed to her trust. Her great communion spans the earth from north to south, from east to west, and yet her children are of one mind, one belief, and one hope. The Catholic is ever at home,

whether he kneels before his lowly altar in regions just converted to faith, or bows down in the ancient temple where all around him are the bright memories of the apostolic day. The man of science and the unlettered peasant meet together in the confession of one glorious creed, not in accents of doubt, but in the bold language of a faith more certain than sight—*faith* which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.”

Who can deny the work of God, or venture to ascribe such concord to human power? Who will not grant to the Catholic Church the supernatural life which thus far has marked her wonderful career, which has distinguished her from every society which has appeared on the page of history?

“Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.”

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.” If the Catholic Church could have been destroyed, she would long since have vanished from the earth. Now, when she stands before us after eighteen centuries in all the vigor of youth, shall she not persevere to the end to the glory of Jesus Christ her founder, and the salvation of men whom He redeemed? Yes; the only witness which God has upon earth, the only “pillar and ground of the truth,” she shall finish her glorious career, stand in her lot amid every storm, and only deliver up her great commission when Christ, her master, shall come again to gather together His elect, and establish His reign of everlasting peace.

Here, therefore, we conclude our brief discourse. We have shown the nature and sphere of both reason and faith, and by the

deductions of reason alone have been able to know that God has made a revelation to man, and that this revelation has been committed to the Catholic Church, that through her we may learn the divine purposes of grace and the wisdom that leads to salvation. Here are harmonized all that we have learned in the light of nature, and by the more resplendent beams of grace. Here the soul which thirsts for truth shall find itself satisfied. Here the heart which yearns for God shall taste the well-spring of delight. Oh! that the sun of righteousness would arise upon our beloved country, and guide minds honest and true to the rest they long for, that the mists of error and prejudice might melt away, and display to the unquiet wanderer the home of faith in its true beauty! His thanksgiving would go up to God with the royal psalmist: "This is my rest for ever and ever; here will

I dwell, for I have chosen it.”* “How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle a nest: Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God.”†

* Psalm cxxxi. 14. † Psalm lxxxiii. 1-4.

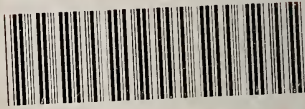
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